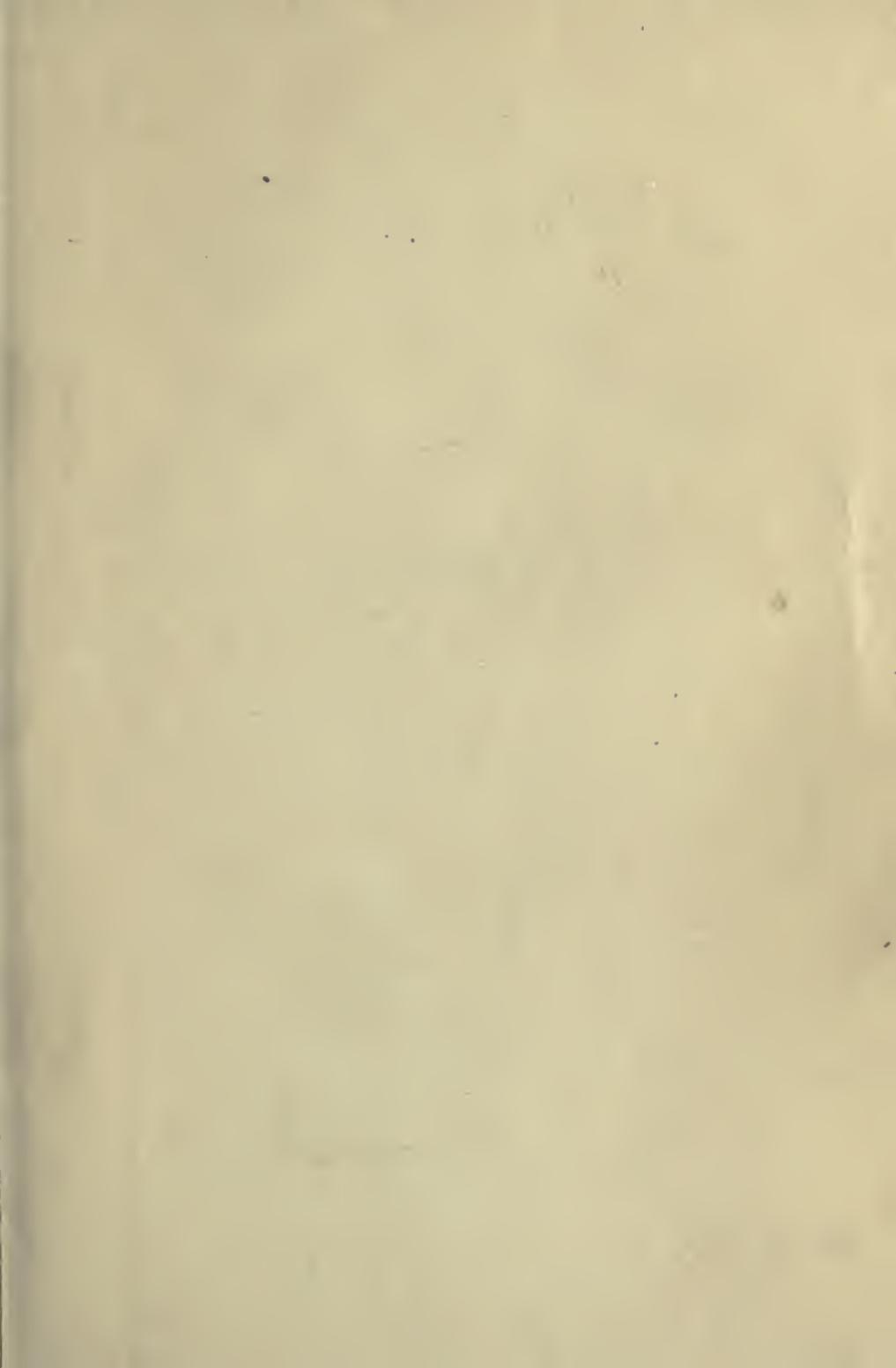


THE
CONVERSATIONS OF
PADAN ARAM
DAVID DONALD

WITH A FOREWORD
BY
SIR JAMES M. BARRIE

457-



THE CONVERSATIONS
OF PADAN ARAM

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By AMY LE FEUVRE

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FOREWORD

BY

SIR J. M. BARRIE

THE only Padan Aram I ever heard of as lying north of the Tweed is barely large enough to house all Mr. Donald's characters (and you shall search long in it for his "manse," with which it should have begun): one may surmise that he liked the name and did some juggling with the local sign-posts. Wherever his Padan Aram is it is certainly a place he knows well and loves much; his pages are full of "homely sense and shrewd," and we become so familiar with his people, as they move leisurely thro' his pages that we feel we have chatted with them at their doors or called to them in their fields. So leisurely are they

Foreword

indeed, so willing to come to a full stop and discuss the crops or the universe, that we are obviously in times long before the war—in days when railway trains passed in the distance, but were not for us. The cinema magnates, we are told, can put any life on the “screen,” but we defy them to go slow enough for Padan Aram, though it would be capital exercise for them to try, for here are many romances much truer than those of the whirling sort, many characters vividly drawn, many talks about little things and about the greatest things in the world, treated with an odd mixture of humour and fine romance.

THE CONVERSATIONS OF PADAN ARAM

I

THE ATTACK ON THE MINISTER

NEWS was always scarce in Padan Aram : scarce as gold. It had to be eked out with talk and discussion. And all the talk and all the discussion of Padan Aram had a distinctly religious flavour.

In days of news famine, John Ingles, the Elder, would saunter up to the Manse. He made many halts on the way, just to prove to himself, and to any who might be standing at their doors, that it did not matter whether he ever got there or not.

The Elder was always welcome at the Manse. The Rev. Jacob Stewart loved Ingles for his

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common-sense : and the Elder was ever athirst for a draught from the Minister's wider experience.

“ Man,” said the Elder, “ ye've gotten a fine lot o' books here.”

The Minister and the Elder were seated in the Manse study. The walls were dadoed with books : big books on the floor, and little books higher up the wall. Here and there they were grouped according to subject, and yonder, as an indication that the Minister was not without a sense of order, they wére grouped according to their bindings.

“ Some o' them are auld freends and willing helpers,” rejoined the Minister.

“ I'm thinkin' that ye'll be owing something o' yer preachin' to them,” ventured the Elder.

“ Ay,” returned, the Minister, “ the fowk dinna see onybody but me i' the pulpit on Sabbath, but there's mair nor me there. When I've gotten the Precentor i' the chair below me, I've generally gotten some o' thae auld freends standin' wi' me : whiles, as mony as sax. It croods the pulpit a bittie, but I dinna mind that,

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sae lang as they dinna bring their bindings wi' them. That I couldna hae. The fowk maunna see them. When they speak, they maun speak wi' my tongue, an' be content wi' inverted commas i' the manuscript, an', 'as the poet says,' i' the preachin'. Ye see I hae the better o' them on Sabbath ; but man, last nicht they had the better o' me."

"How was that?" queried the Elder.

"I'll tell ye," answered the Minister. "I was sittin' here quiet by mysel'. It was late. The clatter o' the last loom was stopped, an' the last weaver was straichtenen' his back afore he creepit intil his bed. There wasna a sound but the maudlin' mutterin's o' that belated wastrel, Alec, creepin' hame frae 'The Malt Shovel.'

"I kent the lad's voice. I heard him chappin' at a door lower doon. Presently a garret window opened, and a woman's voice turned him awa, sayin', 'Thank God, ye dinna belang to us, Alec. Yer hoose is roond the corner. Thank God ye dinna belang to us.' Then all was quiet.

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“It wasna quiet for lang. There was a whirrin’ i’ the room, as if soonds were comin’ thegither to mak a sentence. When the sentence was made, it began to whizz roond and roond till I got it. It cried, ‘Ye dinna belang to us. Ye dinna belang to us.’ It cam frae the wa’ ahent me, then frae the tap shelf, and then frae every place at aince. I turned sudden, and caught it comin’ frae the floor, frae amang a puckle big books lyin’ there. ‘Ye dinna belang to us !’ they said. I lookit to see wha they were. They were ‘The Book o’ Martyrs’ in green, an’ ‘The Scots Worthies’ in half calf, wi’ its brave tales o’ the sufferin’s o’ the Covenanters. And I saw at aince that in my quiet Manse, wi’ a loyal people aboot me, I didna belang to them.

“After a whilie, ane o’ the upper shelves took up the cry. It was the fiction shelf, full o’ heroes and heroines wha had suffered impossible trials in impossible quantities, and escaped, because the authors had forgotten some o’ the facts. Na, I didna belang to them.

“A couple o’ missionaries alangside, modestly

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but firmly, refused to allow me to belang to them: an' then a crood o' poets and singers, though they did it in rhyme and to music, flung me oot o' their company.

“Half a dozen makers o' history and breakers o' nations made themselves heard through the clash o' arms an' the groans o' the dyin'. ‘Ye dinna belang to us,’ I heard them say. ‘Thank God for that!’ I gasped.

“Man, I was bein' turned oot o' ma ain hoose: thrown ower by ma chosen cronies: disowned by some I loved, and by mair that I revered. I was in a maze as to whar to hide masel’.

“I made a dash for the children's books. They laughed at me wi' ma auld face an' black cravat. The princes and princesses o' the fairy tales jeered.

“I tried the school books, but they thrust quadratic equations in ma face; and the books o' science turned awa snortin', because I didna believe in evolution. The geography books said that I hadna travelled; and the art books asked

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me the difference between Pre-Raphaelitism and Supra-Lapsarianism.

“ I sank back in ma chair a dishonoured man. I thocht that I had complimented these masters by a place in the Manse, and noo they turned roond on me, and insisted that it was me wha was oot o’ place.

“ Suddenly I seized on the great preachers. They answered wi’ a query after the word ‘great’; and the commentators said that I was nae guid there, till I was dead. An’ I didna want to dee on a Saturday, because there’s aye ham an’ egg for breakfast on Sabbath.

“ ‘The Bible !’ I cried, ‘The Bible !’ But the patriarchs wadna hae me. They said I wasna auld enough : nor the prophets, because I was Scotch. I tried the apostles, but they had heard that I wasna in the true apostolic succession. They didna ken what that was, but I wasna in it. That was enough. And the publicans left me severely alone, because I had always been honest.

“ Weel,” said I, “ I’ll awa to ma bed. Bed

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'll hae me. I was just knockin' the dottle oot o' ma pipe, when I heard a voice at ma back, sayin', 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I . . . follow . . . after.'

"That's my company," I cried, "I belang to you. I belang to them that follow after . . . to them that follow after."

"Gie's a haud o' yer hand," said the Elder, "we're o' the same company: the great company o' them That Follow After."

II

A RAINY DAY IN PADAN ARAM

THE Little Boy had run all the way, for it was raining. When he got into Sanders' workroom, he took off his bonnet, and holding it by the tails, gave it a long sweep through the air. The result was that he made a dotted wet line down the whitewashed wall. The Little Boy was frightened at what he had done and looked towards Sanders. Fortunately Sanders was at the window, and did not see it.

“I dinna like the rain,” said the Little Boy.

“Hoo’s that?” queried the old man without looking round.

“Ach! It weets yer claes, an’ maks the roads that sticky; an’ yer mither winna let ye get oot to play.”

Sanders was taking in his geraniums from the

A Rainy Day in Padan Aram

window-sill. One of the flowers was falling to pieces, and Sanders was smiling pleasantly at it.

“The flooer’s deein’, Sanders, and ye’re lauchin’,” suggested the Little Boy.

“I’m no lauchin’ because the flooer’s deein’, but I am glad to see that wee Raindrop gi’en it its last drink. Just look !”

The Little Boy looked, and saw a tiny raindrop quivering over the yellow heart of the dying flower.

“I ken a story aboot Padan Aram Raindrops,” said Sanders.

The Little Boy waited expectantly.

“I’m thinkin’ that in Padan Aram there’s millions o’ them : mair Raindrops nor people ; an’ sometimes it seems to me, that Padan Aram belangs mair til them than to the fowk wha live in it.

“Noo, it happened that on a day, a million or twa o’ the Padan Aram Raindrops cam droppin’ doon frae the sky. First a puckle drops wha were ready afore the ither, came doon on tip-toe : then ither in a hurry, pretendin’ that they

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werena late. Then after a bittie, cam thoosands o' them, croodin' thegither, but never touching ane anither.

“Even them wha were maist in a hurry, didna forget their duty. They washed the air as they cam through.”

“Washed the air?” said the Little Boy.
“Does the air need washin’, Sanders?”

“Ay, does it that. Hae ye no heard o’ the measles? They bide i’ the air: and the diphtheria, an’ the sneezes. They were a’ hidin’ i’ the air that day, but the Padan Aram Raindrops chased them oot, an’ flung them on the groond; and ye could hear them shoutin’ when they got them down, ‘Shoo! Shoo! ye shameless slayers o’ wee bairnies.’

“Some o’ them washed the roofs o’ the hooses, whar ye canna reach wi’ the besom; an’ the ootsides o’ the windows, so as to save the tired womenfowk wark; an’ some filled the wells to mak the tea; and the lave of o’ them washed the roads and the cows, and the pig-styes, and the fences, and the mile stanes; and a great rush o’

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them took hands and galloped doon the gutters to the brook.

“The brook was low, for it hadna rained for days. Just below the brig, behind a stane, a trout was prisoned in a hole, waitin’ for the Padan Aram Raindrops to help him oot. He was dreamin’ that he heard their shout as they louped ower the rocks higher up, when he woke wi’ a start, to find that they were a’ roond his bed, takin’ aff the bed claes. In a flash he shot oot o’ his hole intil the big pool, whar a’ his cousins war.

“A fisherman’s boat was drawn up on the sandy bank at the side o’ the river. The fisherman was tryin’ to get it aff. He could hae done it a’ himsel’, but the Padan Aram Raindrops wadna let him. They rushed across, got under the boatie, stuck their feet intil the yellow sand up to the ankles, wi’ their heads against the sides o’ the thing, and fairly lifted it aff the bottom ; and then ran aff at top speed to dae something else.

“A great band o’ Sunbeam-Brigands war

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hidin' behind a cloud-bank, waitin' for the Rain-drops, and when they cam alang, they dashed doon to the river at a thoosand miles a meenute. They clutched thae Raindrops wi' their warm hands, and lifted them up oot o' the river, through the air, and pet them in a cloud carriage. The South Wind blew them back ower Padan Aram. The North Wind cam and chased the South Wind awa, and got the grey carriage full o' the Raindrops. But when the North Wind looked at them they a' turned pale and then pure white, and war nae langer roond Raindrops, but war sparklin' pure white stars and crosses. They slipped gently oot o' the carriage an' began dancin' and chasin' ane anither through the air doon til Padan Aram. They fell on the trees and hedges and fields so gently, that the hedges hardly kent that they war there, and the trees when they opened their een i' the mornin', didna ken ane anither, but thocht that they maun hae gotten intil Ghost-Land.

“After that the Raindrops had lang travels intil Holland to see the windmills, and intil Spain

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to find oot if the lads and lasses there had gotten on their wooden shoon, and then halfway across to America. Syne they changed their minds, and cam back, and here they are agen in Padan Aram.

“Just look oot o’ the windy and ye’ll see them ; they’re fa’en amang the corn in Farmer Fotheringay’s fields, an’ the corn canna stand straight for lauchin’.”

“I’m nearly wishin’ I was a Raindrop masel’, if they hae sich grand adventures,” said the Little Boy.

“Laddie,” said the old man seriously, “A’ thing that is faithfu’ to the purpose for which it was created, has grand adventures and is guid in its time. Noo, can ye tell me what little boys were created for ? ”

No, the Little Boy could not guess any useful purpose that they served. He had heard his mother say more than once that she did not know. His father knew of nothing they were created for but mischief, and his sisters regarded their creation as nothing more nor less than a

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hideous blunder. So he did not dare to suggest a reason.

“Dae ye no ken the first question in yer Catechism ? ” snapped the old man.

The Little Boy nodded. Of course he knew that.

“Weel, I'll ask ye,” said Sanders. “What is the chief end of man ? ”

The Little Boy was at it like a swallow at a fly, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.”

“Noo,” said Sanders, “you're a man, though a gye little ane, and if ye'll just try glorifyin' God and enjoyin' Him, ye'll hae mair wonderful adventures nor the Padan Aram Raindrops, and dae guid in yer time as weel.”

III

ON PROMISES, AND HOW IT IS EASY TO KEEP THEM

MRS. INGLES was ironing ; so the Elder could not get to the fire. He looked out into the garden, but it was too dark to do anything there. He dauntered about the house unable to settle himself. After missing the fizzing iron two or three times by the barest chance, he got up and lit his lantern. He owed the Minister a call. He paid it there and then.

On the mantelpiece above the study fire in the Manse, a long clay pipe was always lying primed. It had lain there waiting for the Elder for the greater part of a week. He took it down, pressed the tobacco tight into the bowl with his middle finger, gently moistened the red tip of the mouthpiece with his tongue, reached a

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spill, and began to draw with a great smacking of lips : for tobacco was precious in those days.

“Are a’ the promises i’ the Bible for everybody ?” the Elder asked himself, when his pipe was well alight. Then the Elder waited for himself, while he got ready the answer.

“Na,” said he, “not a’ o’ them : for some are for Abraham alone. Ye’ll mind the time when Rob Chalmers was persuaded to come and hear ye preach, Maister Stewart, and ye preached aboot the promises, and tellt us a’ to tak the promises and mak them wer ain ?”

The Minister remembered.

“Weel, Rob went hame and found a promise that pleased him fine. It was in the Book o’ Genesis. And it read like this, ‘Arise, walk through the land in the length and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee.’ Rob made that promise his ain, and walked through the length and the breadth o’ a’ the farms roond Padan Aram, and then laid claim to them. The godly farmers war dumbfoonded. They werna sae glib as Rob, and didna ken what tae answer

On Promises

him. And when they seemed loath to let him hae the farms he offered to mak a compromise, and that was that if it should so happen that he should come on their land ony nicht after a few rabbits, they wadna ever agen ca' him a poacher. And they, douce men, were a' sae taken aback by the mention o' God's name and the Book o' Genesis, that they couldna say onything ; so Rob said it was a bargain.

“After that he grew bolder, and said that he wad tak his promise and walk up tae London wi' it. The women fowk began tae tremble for the King, and to wonder what he'd dae, if Rob turned him oot o' the Palace door. A Duke didna matter. But after a' Rob had tae find a mair suitable promise. ‘However willin’ the Lord micht be,’ he said, ‘there seemed tae be considerable deefficulties i’ the way.’ ”

The Minister laughed at the only attempt of which he had heard, in which his advice had been taken seriously.

“And noo, as for mysel’,” continued the Elder, “I’m aye fond o’ readin’ aboot Elijah ;

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and ye wadna think hoo that is, so I'll tell ye. It's because the Lord aince sent him to a brook. Man, I'm awfie fond o' a brook mysel', when the troot are movin'. Weel, it micht be last year when I went doon tae the brook I clean forgot ma bread and cheese. The fishin' was that fine that I wandered for twa or three mile, and clean forgot that I had forgot ma bread and cheese till it cam to fower o'clock. But there werna ony ravens cam tae bring me bread and meat. I'm expectin' that there arena enough ravens i' Padan Aram for that."

The Minister agreed. It was his duty to agree tentatively at suitable points. These agreements were regarded merely as refreshers to help the speaker forward in his argument. These assents, uttered in the course of an argument, however, were never held to be binding when it came to replying at the conclusion.

"Noo, I've come to the belief," went on the Elder, "that there's no ony infallible rule for tellin' which promises are for which, and that a man must just dae his best tae find oot. What

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is certain is, that there are promises enough for everybody withoot robbin' Abraham o' his, or Elijah o' his ; and especially in the New Testament.

“And then there's the question o' hoo tae read the promise when we hae gotten it.

“Noo, I'm thinkin' it's gye like readin' a letter. When I get a letter frae the lad in India I gae awa and get three candles tae read it by. And the first candle is the candle o' common-sense. It's nae use tryin' tae read withoot that. Then I bring oot the candle o' ma ain experience, for I was a lad aince mysel'. And then I try tae get the candle o' the boy's ain spirit. For after a', hoo can I understand what the laddie says if I dinna ken the laddie. So I'm thinkin' when I've gotten a Bible promise afore me, I can only understand it wi' ma ain common-sense and experience, and by gettin' intil the spirit o' the Good Lord wha made it.”

The Minister moved uneasily in his chair. In his hurry and zeal when preaching, he had sometimes forgotten the candle of common-sense.

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“There’s ae thing mair that I’ll ask,” the Elder went on, “and that is, ‘When are we to use the promises?’”

The Minister looked up. He was trying for the moment to think of any time when it was not useful to use the promises ; but the rules of debate did not allow him to speak at this point.

“Na,” said the Elder answering the Minister’s thought. “Na, na, ye dinna want tae use them a’ the time. The promises are like yon lamp. When dae ye licht yer lamp? Is it no when ae day has gone and anither hasna come? When did I licht ma auld lantern? Was it no when I was comin’ frae the licht o’ ma ain hoose alang the dark road tae the licht o’ yours? That is when tae use the promises : in the dark places between the lichts.”

The Minister gazed at the fire and sat silent. He was himself just then in the dark between two daylights. He was telling himself that he would light a promise when the Elder was gone.

Ingles knocked the ashes out of his pipe and

On Promises

put it back on the mantelpiece, to show that he was done.

“And noo,” said the Minister, when the interval demanded by etiquette was spent, “can ye tell me hoo it is that a promise maks ye happy? A promise is naething ava. Indeed a promise o’ onything is a proof that the thing is no there; and yet a promise maks ye happy. The fact is ye’re enjoyin’ the thing before ye’ve got it. When I hear Jock Webster shoutin’ his coals on his way up here, I begin to feel warm already. Jock Webster’s cry isna coals, I’ll admit, but it tells me coal is comin’, and the soond o’ it maks the tips o’ ma fingers glow.

“But there’s a mair important question than that,” went on the Minister, “and that is, ‘Why does God keep His promises?’ Maist o’ us ken that there are mony promises, and very beautiful promises they are, but some o’ us are a little dootful as to whether thae promises will be kept. Noo, God keeps His promises, and I will tell ye why. He never promises onything but what He wants to gie. The wife is awfie

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like Him. She promises her little lass that when she is big she shall go to school like Nellie. Man! she never intended onything else. She has promised her as weel that she shall get a white frock for the Sabbath School Soiree. She had got the stuff in the drawer long before she made that promise. And she promises the little lass that if ever she gets ill she'll nurse her. The wife 'll keep a' thae promises. She aye keeps her promises, because she only promises the things she wants tae dae. Losh keep's a', she'd dae just the same if she hadna promised. God doesna give because He has promised; He promises because He's going to give."

"Ye'll be at the kirk on Sabbath," said the Minister, as he let his friend out. The Elder promised. The Minister never doubted. The promise made no difference in the matter. Of course he was at the kirk.

IV

THE ACORNS THAT BECAME

IT was evening. The Little Boy was passing Farmer Fotheringay's fields. Looking that way, he saw a sow and her litter very busy. Between grunts and squeaks, they were filling themselves with something which they were finding in the grass. The Little Boy crept through the hedge on his hands and knees, and began to bark like a dog. The tiny pigs rushed behind the sow. The Little Boy found that the pigs were munching acorns. He filled the right-hand pocket of his knickerbockers. He would have filled the left-hand pocket too, only that his knife and top and kite string took up room. Then he strolled down the road as if it did not matter.

When he reached Sanders' cottage, the old man had just finished mending a labourer's boot. He flung it with a clatter on the stone floor.

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“I wish I could mend the man wha belongs til that boot,” he said, “as easily as I can mend the boot that belongs to him.”

The Little Boy did not understand.

Presently the Little Boy took out a handful of acorns from his pocket and put them on the bench.

“Shall I eat them?” he said.

“Acorns are for pigs to eat, and little boys to listen to,” murmured Sanders.

The Little Boy was accustomed to bring things to Sanders, because Sanders could make them talk. All things could talk when Sanders had them : although it must be confessed, that whatever talked, talked strangely like Sanders.

The old man took the acorns and put them in the bowl with the hob nails. They looked like a family of little mice crowded together in a nest. Their bodies were drawn up in folds, their little tails stuck out behind, and all their noses were shiny.

Sanders took one out of the nest, and warmed it at the candle, then held it to his ear. No, it

The Acorns that became

was not saying anything. Then he knocked it with his awl, as if he were rapping at its bedroom door ; but there was no answer. So he blew out the candle. Sanders always did this. He said that things which had no tongue could only talk in the dark. The Little Boy was sure of this, for he had never heard them talk in the light.

Now, the old man seemed more hopeful. He seized another by the tail and held it to his ear. A smile spread over his face. He evidently had found out the way. It was by pinching its tail.

Just then a gentle murmur was heard, “Burr—r—r—r. Burr—r—r—r, I shall be a squirrel.”

“Nonsense !” said Sanders, and he put it down in a huff.

“Burr—r—r—r.” It was shouting to be heard again. So Sanders gave it another chance.

“Burr—r—r—r, a squirrel will nest in me.”

The old man seemed satisfied this time, and replaced it gently on the bench, and took another out of the nest.

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“Burr—r—r, I shall be a tree, and gie shade to the cows in summer.”

Sanders took another.

“Burr—r—r, I shall be a big door wi’ shiny panels, i’ the hoose o’ the Duke o’ Buccleuch.”

Sanders did not care in whose house he was going to be a big door with shiny panels.

“Burr—r—r, I shall be a toon coonsellor’s desk.” “Burr—r—r, I shall be the side o’ a ship an’ traivel ower a’ the airth. Burr—r.”

“Ha ! Ha !” laughed the Little Boy.
“How ? how ?”

Sanders looked at him severely.

“Dae ye no ken that thae acorns are oak trees no yet born ?”

Presently on the bench where Sanders had laid the talking acorns there was a great hullabaloo. At first it was difficult to catch what was going on, then gradually the noise got more orderly, and the Little Boy made it out. It was this. “Burr—r—r. Bury me ! Bur-r-r. Bury me ! Bury me ! Burr-r-r.”

“Oh, dinna bury them,” cried the Little Boy.

The Acorns that became

“Na ! Dinna bury them. Let them live an’ be a’ thae things they hae been sayin’, an’ maybe I’ll get to see them.”

But all the acorns shouted together, “Burr—r—r, Bury me ! Bury me ! Deep ! Deep ! Pet a fence round me ! Burr—r—r.”

“Hoo is it that they want a fence pet roond them ? ” asked the Little Boy. “Is it so as they canna climb oot ? ”

“Na,” replied the old man, “It’s so as the horses winna trample on their hands, when they push them up.”

So the Little Boy buried them carefully : each one separately : very far apart, and in the hedge-row, where they would be safe from the heavy hoofs of the horses. He left plenty of room for the acorn that was to nest a squirrel, for he loved that squirrel already ; and more room for the side of a ship ; and he gave a special place to the town councillor’s desk.

On Saturday half-holidays he used to go down to see if those acorns had yet become. Many times he went, but he never saw them. Yet I am

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told that long years after, when Sanders was lying quiet in the graveyard, on the side of the hill, and the Little Boy himself had become an old man, those acorns were all those things they said they would be, only in other places.

Sanders used to say, that the Square in Padan Aram was a wonderful place, because it was there “lads and lassies tellt ane anither their fortunes in whispers” ; and the kirk was a wonderful place, because there “auld men and women had told the Lord such sacred things with tears” : but the most wonderful place in Padan Aram, he always contended, was the graveyard, for “there,” said he, “are buried those wha shall become kings and priests and just men made perfect.”

Sanders never saw those kings and priests and just men made perfect, in the graveyard, though he was often there : still it is true that they were all those things, only in a Heavenly Place.

V

JOHN DUTHIE EDITS THE PRAYER MEETING PRAYERS

“**Y**E were askin’ the young people to pray in the Prayer Meetin’,” said the Elder.

“I was that,” sententiously replied the Minister.

“It’s no sae easy for a beginner to pray i’ the Prayer Meetin’,” continued the elder.

The Minister agreed.

“Ye see, there’s the question o’ standin’. The young fowk, when they pray at hame, kneel in front o’ a chair ; an’ in the Prayer Meetin’ it’s no convenient kneelin’ in front o’ a chair. They hae to stand up, and it’s no sae easy to pray standin’ up, if ye’re i’ the habit o’ the ither way.”

The Minister nodded.

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“What’s mair, i’ the Prayer Meetin’ ye’ve got to pray so as the ither fowk can hear ye, but they’re used to pray so as the ither fowk canna hear, though they’re only the ither side o’ a lath and plaster wall.”

The Minister smiled assent.

“An’ then there’s the question o’ the ‘Thou’ and ‘Thee.’ Ay, that’s a ticklish question. They didna teach ‘Thou’ and ‘Thee’ in the Saxpenny Reader, nor yet in the Tenpenny. Man, the ‘hast’ and the ‘wast’ are awfie confusin’, an’ the ‘wert’ an’ the ‘wilt be’ fairly ding a body.”

The Minister felt the force of the argument. He had regretted the difficulty many a time, but he was still in a quandary as to what should be done. He blamed the Romanists who would not leave their Latin for the sake of God’s heritage, and here was he, unwilling to leave the ancient forms of English speech for the sake of babes. Yet it was not that alone. It was that he feared God. So the Minister hedged.

“John Duthie doesna ‘Thou’ and ‘Thee’

John Duthie edits the Prayers

when he prays," said the Minister, "he just says 'You' and 'Your.' "

John Duthie was the Roadmender. He lived at the Toll. He had a head that was perfectly bald, if baldness admits of perfection. But what frightened the children more was, that his face was bald. He made his living by breaking stones, and his character by giving one hour's thinking to one minute of talking.

"I mind a week o' Duthie's prayers," the Minister went on. "The Manse was being cleaned. The family was awa in Edinburgh ; and as Duthie was alone at the same time, I arranged to gae doon an' bide at the Toll. Duthie lit the fire an' stirred the porridge i' the mornin', an' I washed up the dishes at nicht. Duthie gaed til his bed early, and I dawdled a wee bittie wi' a book. But I didna often get muckle readin' done after Duthie was in his garret. As soon as he had gotten aff wi' his jacket, he was on wi' his prayers. He shut the door, that I'm no denyin' ; but he couldna pray unless he prayed oot loud. In that quiet wee hoosie I could hear ilka word.

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It was then that I'd hae to pet ma book doon, an' pray wi' him. The week passed, an' it cam til Saturday. We went to the Prayer Meetin' thegither. When we had gotten hame, Duthie reepit awa up the stairs til his bed, and began his devotions as usual ; and as usual I joined in. Then withoot ony warnin', to my astonishment, he began to edit the Prayer Meetin' prayers."

"What might ye mean by that ?" queried the Elder.

"Just bide a wee and ye'll see. Duthie began in this way, 'Lord, Ye needna tak' the Elder seriously when he says that he's a' "wounds an' bruises an' putrifyin' sores." He's the healthiest Presbyterian i' Padan Aram, if ye dinna coont the Minister. If Ye'll be sae kind as to overlook his leein' this time, I'll gae an' mak him show me thae putrifyin' sores, an' then maybe he'll be mair carefu'.'"

The Minister paused for comment.

The Elder smiled and said, "I'm better noo."

"'Wi' respect to Farmer Fotheringay wha

John Duthie edits the Prayers

prayed, "Bless us in oor basket an' in oor store." He doesna need ony mair in his basket, it's fu' and skailin': nor in his store. He canna get the door open as it is. If Ye could spare him a gratefu' heart, it micht be useful.

"'Yon auld carl wha 'prayed. Ye'll mind he aye prays the same thing. Ye needna tak special notice. It's just Jeams's weekly. The things he asked for are no the things he wants: but they're the only things he kens hoo to ask for. Ye'll ken brawly Yersel' what he needs. Thae words o' his are just like raps on the door. They dinna mean onything, but just that there's a puir body at the door wha wants help.

"'Lord, Ye mind yon Sabbath Skule teacher wha prayed Ye to help him wi' his class.' (Duthie paused a moment to give the Lord time to remember.) 'Dinna dae onything o' the kind. He's just lazy. He winna prepare his lesson. He doesna need ony help, Lord. Let him wark.

"'Ah, Lord, the Minister was wrang a'the-gither when he prayed that we micht hae under-

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standin' hearts. What we need in oor kirk is willin' hearts. Ye might let us hae three-quarters o' a dozen o' that kind, gin Ye hae them to spare.

“‘Gentle God, hear a word for them that didna pray. Widow Dundas needs mair nor I hae been able to gie her this week. And if Ye could gie an extra half oor o’ sunshine on the upstairs windy o’ the third hoose i’ the Buckle-maker Wynd, it might help a wee lass wha’s lyin’ there ill.

“‘An’ a hint to the Minister to get oot o’ Jeremiah as soon as he can, is mair nor I dare gie, but it wadna come amiss frae You.

“‘Lord, for pity’s sake, bless Padan Aram. Oh Lord, for pity’s sake.’”

“So John Duthie’s a freend o’ us baith,” said the Elder, with a twinkle at the recollection of Jeremiah.

“A freend o’ us a’,” said the Minister.

VI

KIRSTY PIE TURNS THE STORY ROUND

WOMEN were not allowed to speak in the kirk at Padan Aram. They never noticed this to be inconvenient. Their exclusion was according to ancient custom. Besides, there was something in the old Book about it.

It was Kirsty Pie who nearly caused the rule to be broken.

Kirsty was an old maid. She kept a little shop down two steps. In the winter she sold potted-head ; in the summer curds and whey ; and Padan Aram rock all the year round, and all the country round.

On Sabbath she was a teacher in the Sabbath School. Her class consisted of the big girls

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and women. The ambition to get into Kirsty's class was very great among growing girls. It was by the threat that they would never be big enough to get into Kirsty's class, that mothers induced unwilling daughters to sup their porridge in the morning, to swallow their broth at dinner time, and their medicine at all times. Many were the devices practised among these same young people to look older than their years. Hair was gathered up into a net before the recognised age, and frocks were lengthened by the secret letting down of hems, until there was scarcely a growing girl in Padan Aram with a hem to her skirt.

Kirsty was a favourite speaker at the Sabbath School Anniversary. No minister could equal her there. Of course, she must not address the assembly in the kirk, nor even from the platform in the schoolroom. She could do, on Anniversary Sabbaths, however, what she did on other Sabbaths: that is to say, she could sit on her chair in the school and address her own class. This she did, with this difference, that

Kirsty Pie turns the Story round

her chair was brought into the middle of the room. Her class gathered round her. Other classes gathered round hers, and women came in and sat on benches against the wall.

Men could not countenance the evasion of established order, but being unwilling to miss the treat which Kirsty invariably provided for these occasions, they hung round the door like drones round a hive.

Kirsty had been speaking of the heavenly life: of God's kindly disposition towards us: and of Jesus' interest in every one; until women were no longer weary drudges, girls no longer hard-worked serving maids, and weavers no longer men with bent backs and dragging gait. They were sons and daughters of heaven.

A little kilted laddie, sitting on his mother's knee at the back, whispered in his mother's ear.

“Gae awa an' ask her yersel'” replied the mother.

“Kirsty,” said the little Kiltie, when with shy steps he got up to the old lady, “will ye no tell the bairns a story?”

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Kirsty did not kiss the child, for kisses are rare in Padan Aram ; but she replied in the sweet dialect beloved of exiles from Padan Aram, “That will I, ma brave wee birkie.”

“I maun confess,” said Kirsty, lifting her eyes again to her class, “I’m awfie fond o’ a story masel’. Mony’s the story I’ve heard and mony’s the story I’ve told ; but what I’m most fond o’ is turnin’ the stories roond. Ye ken there’s aye twa sides to a story.

“Aince when I was listenin’, I heard a Sunbeam tellin’ a story til some ither sunbeams. It had dawdled on the way i’ the evenin’, and got too late to win hame, and was lost. It was tellin’ the sunbeams what it saw after they had gone.

“‘Hoo dark it is,’ said she, ‘when the sunbeams gae hame, and hoo cauld ! Men dinna walk aboot : bairns lie as if dead. All sorts o’ wicked deeds are done, an’ there are cries o’ cruelty. I saw a drunken faither staggerin’ hame to little children.’

“A’ the sunbeams wept, and the Sunbeam

Kirsty Pie turns the Story round

wept too ; for it felt that it had wasted its precious life.

“ But as I listened, I heard the story o’ that Sunbeam, told by some little children.

“ ‘ What fun ! ’ cried one, ‘ a sunbeam cam oor way i’ the nicht. It was lost an’ tryin’ to find its way hame. It stood up and looked oot o’ the windy : it sat doon, an’ turned somersaults, and then shot oot its arms and legs ower every-thing wi’ little jerks. Bairns opened their een an’ werna feard. Dark corners war filled wi’ licht. The river sparkled. A laddie loupedit oot o’ bed, an’ was ower early for his breakfast, an’ a man had to come hame because the shops werna open. Come again, little Sunbeam ! Come i’ the nicht when ither sunbeams dinna come. Come whar the ither haes never been.’

“ As the Sunbeam saw its life,” continued Kirsty, “ it was naething but a sad life. But the children saw the ither side o’t, an’ the side they saw was the heavenly side. Ay, for life has an airthly side, and a heavenly side : and the heavenly side is the side that matters.

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“There are even twa sides,” went on Kirsty, “to the life o’ Jesus. Jesus was tellin’ His story in heaven to some listenin’ angels. He tellt them hoo there wasna room i’ the inn for His puir tired mither, when she cam exhausted to Bethlehem. He told hoo the king o’ God’s chosen people used his armed men to slaughter the innocent babes o’ Jesus’ native village ! hoo the greatest man that up till that time had ever been born, was beheaded to please a wicked woman, and that by a Jewish monarch : and hoo He Himsel’ was crucified wi’ robbers. It seemed to me a sad, sad story : and I covered ma face . . .

“Presently Mary, the Mother, began to sing the lullaby wi’ which she used to soothe the infant Christ to sleep : and Mary Magalene told o’ the day break withoot deevils ; and hoo she mistook the Saviour for a gairdener. And John the Apostle laid his head on the Lord’s shoulder. Then mony wha were standin’ by called Him ‘Worthy,’ for it was by His sufferin’s that they were happy.

Kirsty Pie turns the Story round

“ Jesus told them the airthly side, and they told Him the heavenly side, though, indeed, He knew it well. And the heavenly side was the sweetest.

“ Preserve’s a’ ! There are even twa sides to the life o’ a Padan Aram woman. There was auld Betsy Macfarlane. Aince when some angels were sittin’ in by, ha’en a bit crack, she must needs begin haverin’ aboot Padan Aram. She was tellin’ them aboot the Square (a’ cobbles), and the Kirk (a’ whitewash), and the farms (naething but oats), when ae pleasant angel said, ‘ Sister, tell us the new chapter i’ the life o’ Jesus.’ Betsy didna just understand. Perhaps she hadna learned the language properly.

“ ‘What’s that?’ said Betsy til the wifie next her.

“ ‘The new chapter i’ the life o’ Jesus,’ answered the woman, ‘means, hoo Jesus lived in you.’

“ ‘Weel, weel,’ said Betsy, ‘I see it brawly noo i’ this licht, this heavenly licht.’ And then she tellt them a’ aboot it.

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“Ma sweet bairns,” concluded Kirsty, “there’s an airthly side til yer life, and aye will be ; but there’s a heavenly side as weel, an’ the heavenly side is the side that matters. Mind the heavenly side. We spend oor years as a tale that is told, wi’ twa sides.

“We maun spend oor years as a tale o’ heaven that is told when the lang shadows fa’ across the darkened earth. And aye it’s the heavenly side that gives the licht, and it is the heavenly side that matters.”

VII

THE BANNOCKS WHICH THE REV. JAMIE FRAZER COULD NOT EAT

MRS. STEWART had asked the Elder to stay to supper. The supper consisted of bannocks and milk. It is not everyone who can bake bannocks. The recipe may be found in some books, but skill comes by being Scotch.

“Mistress Stewart,” said the Elder, as he helped himself to another fragment, “ye ken as weel as ony woman in Padan Aram, hoo to bake the bannocks.”

This was a high compliment; for Mrs. Stewart was an Edinburgh lady; and everybody knows that Edinburgh ladies are clever in all sorts of obscure accomplishments, but that bannocks are beyond them.

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“They’re real guid,” agreed the Minister, “an’ we hae eaten them wi’ a relish, an’ given God thanks.”

The Minister was not favourable to more than a proper meed of praise being given to the cook.

The supper done, they turned to the fire.

“Hae I ever tellt ye aboot the bannocks that the Rev. Jamie Frazer couldna eat?” asked the Minister.

Everybody called Jamie Frazer “The Reverend.” He was not a “Reverend,” however. He was not even married. He had no kirk, and had never been ordained. He had appointed himself a minister; minister of all those who did not attend any church. He claimed, moreover, that he had more members in Padan Aram than Mr. Stewart himself.

“Na, that ye havena,” replied the Elder, sitting back into his chair.

“Weel, there’s nae harm in tellin’ ye noo. Naebody wad object to yer knowin’, not even Mrs. Curly.”

Bannocks

There was a long silence. Then the Minister began.

“ Weelum Curly was happy in his marriage, until his dochter was aboot twal, and his wife aboot forty-six. Then there cam a change. Strange things began to happen. Mrs. Curly had aye been a weel-conducted woman : a church member frae her girlhood, an’ muckle respectit. Weelum worked hard ; but being only an orra man his money wasna regular.”

The Elder understood the difficulties of a woman who was the wife of an “ orra man ” ; for an orra man was one who lived by doing odd jobs : now on a farm, now in the town, and sometimes having to wait for days without a job of any sort.

“ But Mrs. Curly had managed. Now the money wadna dae. The denner grew sma’ an’ was ill cooked. Things went missin’ oot o’ the hoose ; and Mrs. Curly wasna aye hersel’ at nicht. Naebody ever seemed to see her gae to the Public. But ae day the Publican was seen to stop Mrs. Curly i’ the street, an’ whisper something i’ her

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ear, an' shake his finger at her threateningly. She had fallen into bad ways just at that age when more than one woman has.

"I called masel' to try and dae something by way o' persuasion ; but she wouldna see me, an' when I met her i' the street, she aye jookit.

"Then the turn o' the Rev. Jamie cam'. He took up the case. He called, no to see Mrs Curly, but just to hae a game on the draught-board wi' Weelum. He wanted to show respect to Weelum an' his dochter.

"Mrs. Curly generally went oot o' the kitchen when the Rev. Jamie called. That didna matter to Jamie, because Mrs. Curly could hear the talk onygate i' the hoose, an' it was wi' talk wi' Weelum, that the Rev. Jamie hoped to dae his wark.

"'It's your move,' said Jamie as they sat playing ae nicht.

"Jamie was white, an' Weelum was black.

"'It's your move,' repeated Frazer.

"'I was wonderin' whar the wife is,' murmured Weelum.

Bannocks

“ ‘Courage, man,’ said Jamie.

“ ‘I’m tryin’ ma best,’ groaned poor tortured Weelum, ‘but ye ken she was sich a guid lass, an’ it’s hard to see sae brave a lass gae under.’

“ ‘Ay, man,’ sympathised Jamie, ‘it looks as if yer losin’, but ye maun haud oot. Ye’ve gotten the king. Rely on the king.’

“ Jamie couldna see whether Weelum was lookin’ at the board for the king or was lookin’ up ; but he felt him pray.

“ It was months after that, that Weelum’s dochter arrived at the hoose o’ the Rev. Jamie. She was carryin’ a basket wi’ some white paper on the tap o’t.

“ ‘They’re ma ain bakin’,’ stammered the girl. ‘An they hae gotten butter i’ them. They’re a thankofferin’, Mr. Frazer. We hae gotten back ma mither. Faither an’ me hae gotten back ma mither.’

“ Naebody kens exactly hoo it cam aboot. Mrs. Curly hersel’ couldna remember a’ she heard ~~tha~~ twa men say to ane anither, but she does remember ae nicht when she was i’ the

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gairden, and in awfie doon-heartedness, an' it was gye dark. She keekit in through the windy, an' saw thae twa freends, wi' their heads bowed thegither ower the draught-board in supplication. And the Rev. Jamie remembers ae nicht, when he went to the hoose unexpected, how he couldna gae in, but slammed the door an' ran awa hame. 'There war three o' them i' Curly's kitchen,' he said, and he 'daredna gae in.' There was Weelum, sittin' back in his chair moanin' an' Mrs. Curly in front o' him greetin', an' . . . 'God . . . was there . . .,' so Jamie said. And Jamie said that Mrs. Curly was greetin' to Weelum, an' confessin' to God.

"Noo, what to dae wi' thae bannocks Jamie couldna decide. 'They werena his bannocks.' They war 'an offerin' to God,' so he said. He couldna eat them, an' it wad never dae to give them back to the lass. He was in a terrible trachle. He kept them by him for days. Then he brocht them up to me to see if I could help him.

"'What am I to dae wi' them?' he asked in

Bannocks

an agony. ‘They’re no mine, they’re God’s ; an’ hoo to get them to God, I canna tell.’

“‘What hae ye thocht to dae wi’ them ?’ I asked.

“‘I thocht it might be guid to tak them doon to the burn, an’ break them intil the burn, for the burn to carry them to the ocean, an’ God.’

“‘Guid !’ I said.

“‘Or maybe it wadna be ill to tak them up to Bummy Shanner, an’ feed them to the singing birds.’

“‘Guid agen !’

“‘But noo I’m thinkin’ whether or no, ye could pet them on the Lord’s Table at the Communion. They’re holy bread, an’ it might be pleasin’ to God, for the saints to eat them i’ the Sanctuary, i’ the presence o’ the Lord, in remembrance o’ Him. Surely thae bannocks are bread o’ remembrance.’

“That seemed to me a great notion o’ Jamie’s ; an’ I didna just ken what to say. But the mair I thocht o’ the explanations that wad be needed, the mair I saw it was impossible.

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“So we ca’d in Mistress Stewart to ask her what she wad dae wi’ them.

“‘Spread them wi’ sweet butter,’ she said, withoot a meenute’s hesitation.

“That’s what she did. Then she wrapped them up i’ some o’ that crinkly paper, and sent us doon to the hoose o’ Widow Dundas.

“So Jamie an’ me, we broke thae bannocks to Widow Dundas’s weans ; and as they ate the buttered bannocks, we gave God thanks for the restoration of a guid woman overtaken in a trespass.”

“No wonder that Widow Dundas’s bairns hae grown up guid children,” said the Elder. “They hae eaten God’s bannocks.”

VIII

GOD'S CLOTHING SHOPS

THE Little Boy was in a hurry. He had been to Edinburgh, and his mother had bought him a kilt. He was anxious that Sanders should see it. The kilt was of Rob Roy tartan. It had a silver thistle as a buckle, and a goat's-hair pouch decorated the front of it.

“ Ye'll hae been seein' the shops i' Edinburgh, I warrant,” said Sanders. “ Yer mither's gye fond o' lookin' i' the shops. Noo, I'm thinkin' that ye didna see ony o' God's shops in Edinburgh.”

The Little Boy shook his head.

“ Na, ye wadna see thae shops in Princes Street.”

“ Hae you seen them, Sanders ?” queried the Little Boy.

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“Some o’ them,” answered the old man. “Just come here, an’ I think I can show ye ane.”

Sanders took the Little Boy to the door, and pointed out over Farmer Fotheringay’s meadow. It was full of lambs.

“That’s ane o’ God’s Clothin’ Shops,” said Sanders.

The Little Boy stared.

“Ma sicht’s no sae guid as it used to be,” went on the old man. “Ye might just look an’ tell me whether ony o’ thae lambs hae gotten on stockin’s.”

The Little Boy shook his head.

“Then caps? Na? Then waistcoats? Na? Then breeks, that I’m sure o’.”

The Little Boy laughed. Sanders regarded him sternly.

“I canna see for masel’, I maun acknowledge, but I’m sure that thae lambs hae gotten stockin’s and caps on, only they’re no made up yet. Pet doon the address. That’s ane o’ God’s Clothin’ Shops.”

God's Clothing Shops

The Little Boy took a bit of chalk out of the tray, and a slab of sole leather from against the wall, and got ready to write.

“Pet doon the address,” said the shoemaker. “The address is, ‘The Pastures,’ p-a-s-t-u-r-e-s. ‘For the pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys also are covered with corn, they shout for joy, they also sing.’

“Noo, I’ll tell ye whar there’s anither o’ God’s Clothin’ Shops. If ye’re a traveller when ye get big, ye’ll maybe gae there. Only ye’ll hae to be carefu’ that ye dinna slip. It’s gye slippy on the ice. Yer mither has gotten a fur coat, has she no?”

The Little Boy assented.

“I ken whar she got it. It cam oot o’ God’s shop wi’ the frosty window. And it’s second-hand.”

The Little Boy shuddered at the word “second-hand.”

“Yes, second-hand. A seal had it afore yer mither. An’ it fitted the pretty beastie a deal better nor it fits yer mither. The seal thocht

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that he might just as weel wear it while he was waitin' for a sailor to come an' fetch it for her. Pet doon the address. Number 65 Latitude, l-a-t-i-t-u-d-e, North.

"An' ye've gotten a nice collar til yer jacket. It's cotton. Ye didna see ony o' God's Cotton Shops in Edinburgh? Na! That's whar the black man has the best o' ye. He's seen them.

"Noo, I think I might show ye some o' God's Spinners."

The Little Boy's mind ran off to the Buckle-maker Wynd, where the "clack, clack" of the looms was heard all the summer day, and far into the winter's night. But Sanders went to the window, and took from the sill a big cardboard box. When he took off the gauze lid no sound came out. But there was work going on. The Little Boy looked in. In the corners of the box were two or three greenish-white silkworms moving their heads to and fro.

"What are they daen, Sanders?" asked the Little Boy.

"They're makin' silk for Chinamen, an' for

God's Clothing Shops

ladies' dresses, an' umbrellas, an' pocket hankies for lairds. They're God's Spinners. Ye can get doon the address. The address is: 'Where the Mulberry Trees Grow.'

"Ye'll mind how Jesus said that His Heavenly Father clothed 'The People o' Little Faith'? Dae ye ken whar they live? No? Weel, ye can see hoo He does it. It's by keepin' His Shops full, an' His Spinners aye busy. He doesna even shut at denner time."

IX

ENJOY TO-DAY

“ **M**AN,” said the Elder, “ it maun be gye hard to be happy when ye’re no weel.”

“ Wha’s ill ? ” enquired the Minister.

“ Oh, naebody in particular,” replied the Elder, “ only I was thinkin’ to masel’, that I’m only just happy when I’m weel, and it wad be a hard job to be happy if I wasna aye hearty.”

“ The happiest man I ever saw,” murmured the Minister, “ was a lad wha was dyin’.”

“ Wha micht that be ? ” queried the Elder.

“ The lad they ca’d Doctor Sinclair,” replied the Minister. “ Wad ye care to hear aboot him ? ”

Enjoy To-day

The Elder was a child who loved to hear again the stories that he knew best.

“That wad I,” he cried.

The Minister leaned forward, took a red coal from the low bar of the grate with the tongs and lit his newly-filled briar.

“There’s no denyin’,” the Minister began, “that Sinclair was a clever lad, but it was hard work that won him his bursary to the University ; and hard work that got him his cough. That cough got so bad after he started practice in Edinburgh, that some o’ his patients said there was fear that he’d shake the Castle aff its rock ; and his doctor freends said there was nae use dis- guisin’ the fact, that the only change he wad ever see wad be a change for the worse. So he said that if he was gaen to get worse, then he’d get worse in Padan Aram.

“I went to meet him when he cam back. I kent him by his hearty laugh. He was haein a joke wi’ the carrier wha brocht him ower frae Farkeld.

“‘Ye oucht tae let me aff this time, Bruce,’

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he was sayin', 'because its ma last ride.' And then he paid him double. Such an experience the carrier never had before or since.

"He took his young wife's arm and creepit slowly up the street, noddin' to auld acquaintances, and shakin' his finger at the window-blinds behind which wet-eyed women were watching him.

"He had rented a cottage in the High Street, and he made his bed doonstairs by the front window. He had the bed raised on blocks so that he could see oot and could chat wi' them that passed.

"Naebody was ever allowed intil that room. 'Na, na,' he'd say, 'I canna let ye in ; ye might get it, and win tae heaven afore me.'

"The window was always open. There war flowers on the sill to tempt the bees, and crumbs on the pavement to mak the sparrows still mair impudent. And it was Sinclair wha flung the crumbs there.

"When I cam to the windy to speir at him hoo was a' wi' him, and if he was takin' his

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meals, he'd say, 'Ay, I maun tak ma meals and tak them regular, or hoo wad I ken when to tak ma medicine, because I aye hae to tak it afore ma meals or after; and a' that's left to me in between is to be happy.'

"On the foot o' his bed there hung a card. It was a motto in his ain hand-writ. It was in big print letters, 'Enjoy To-day'; for, said the Doctor, 'I havena lang to bide, so I maun crood the meenutes.'

"Man, ye canna get twa pints o' milk intil a one-pint jug, no matter hoo ye try, but that lad had the happiness o' a hale coonty inside his ain skin. There war healthy people in Padan Aram tryin' to bear up under their religion, but his gentle faith carried him."

"Ay," murmured the Elder, "he was happy though he wasna weel."

"When he was a wee bit better nor usual, he'd call to the passers-by. Shy lads in frae the country wad pass the windy as if they didna notice, and then linger in the hope that he wad call. Then he'd ask them hoo their alimentary

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canal was, and they'd tell him that they didna just ken aboot the canal, but the broon troot were risin' fine to the fly in the burn.

“ He aye had a packet o' sweeties for the bairns. When they cam rampagin' oot o' school and doon the High Street, he'd stick his thin hand oot o' the windy like a danger signal on the rail-road ; and when the children stopped, he'd mak them stand in the middle o' the road, whar he could see them better, and say their catechism. Then he'd send them hame wi' sticky mouths for their mithers to wash.

“ When it cam on towards evenin', the older men amang the weavers wad gather aboot his windy, and he'd tell them aboot his medical cases in Edinburgh ; and ask them aboot heaven whar he was gaen ; and wonder whether they'd like to live there when they were turned oot o' Padan Aram by auld Father Time. It was the talking place o' the toon.

“ Mony's the time I hae taen aff ma hat at the windy, and prayed wi' the lad ; and whiles when I hae turned roond, I hae foond a weaver

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wi' his barrow in the road, his bonnet in his hand, and his eyes shut, and I hae heard him say 'Amen.'

"Man, it was grand to see yon frail lad passin' through the valley of the shadow of death. The rod and the staff they comforted him. Young girls lookin' on, longed that they micht be ill, so that they micht be as brave as he. Old people lost the fear o' death, and some even wanted to die wi' him. He was like a lad lookin' forward til a holiday. I heard him ae day after a bout o' coughin' say as soon as he could get his breath, 'Boaz, can I tell them that yer tryin' to be a sober man ?'

"People in Padan Aram began to pray as if they were praying to God, and no sayin' a lesson to the back o' their bedroom chairs ; and to sing as if God were listenin' : and ministers preached as if it mattered. The Spirit cam intil the village, but it didna come oot o' the pulpits ; it cam oot o' that cottage windy."

"Ye're no far wrang," interjected the Elder, "when ye say that this life is no a'."

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“The last time I saw him at his windy, he said, ‘I’m glad I’ve seen God’s fair earth. I should be ashamed to say to God that I havena enjoyed ma stay. I’m just catchin’ up the real life. There’s that sweet mither o’ mine. She slippit awa afore I was big enough to ken how guid she was tae me. That lauchin’ gay mither o’ mine, she slippit awa afore I could gie her a kiss. But I’ll catch her up yet, on some sunny bank, and she’ll hae it yet. I’ll hae guid company on the road. There was Ane wha said, ‘I will come and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.’ I’m wonderin’ just whar He’ll be waitin’. Whar, think ye, Maister Stewart, will He be waitin’? In The Square, think ye? or at the bottom o’ the brae? or by The Wishin’ Gate?’

“Death cam at last; though Death was ashamed to come. He slippit in when a’ the toon was fast asleep, and laid his hand on the Doctor’s wasted body; but the Saviour pet His arms aroond that happy spirit. And Widow Dundas’s bairn lauched in her sleep.”

Enjoy To-day

“I’m no denyin’,” said the Elder, “but that it’s possible to mak this life happy.”

“And this life is no everything,” added the Minister.

X

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

WHEN the Little Boy arrived, Sanders was bobbing an egg in a pan of warm water.

"Is that the way ye boil yer egg, Sanders?" cried he.

"I'm no boilin' ma egg," snapped the old man.

"Noo, what dae ye think is in this egg?" he asked, as he held it up to the light.

The Little Boy knew. "A bit o' yellow wi' white a' roond. Dae ye think I didna ken that, Sanders? Does ma faither no gie me the tap o' his Sabbath egg every Sabbath mornin', while he eats the rest o't?"

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“Weel, ye’re wrang this time,” said Sanders, “as ye’ll see if ye wait a bittie.”

Sanders laid the egg on a pad of flannel in the fender before the fire. He did this so that the Little Boy might watch it. If it had not been for that he would have taken it out to the nest at once.

“What’s that chappin’, Sanders?” shouted the Little Boy excitedly as he knelt with his ear close to the egg in the fender. “It’s chappin’ agen.”

Sanders made no reply. He was making crumbs of a piece of bread, and mixing the crumbs with hard-boiled egg.

Presently the egg-shell cracked. Then it cracked again, and fell in two pieces, and there came struggling and staggering out of it, a yellow chick. This was the last of the brood.

Sanders took up the tiny thing and carried it into the yard where the hen was, with the rest of her family. The mother-hen was all alert but her little crowd were still very shy. Of all the heads under her, there was only one head visible,

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and that among the breast feathers of the fowl. The hen gave a gratified cluck as the new arrival, helped by Sanders, struggled under her wing.

“Thae chicks,” said the old man, referring to the tiny lumps of yellow down which the Little Boy had not yet seen, but which were all hidden under the hen, and which made her swell out and up and down, so that if it had not been for her head, you would not have taken her for a hen at all, “thae chicks are fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Sanders called the old hen and scattered a handful of crumbs just beyond her reach. She made a few clucks, raised herself and moved a step. A crowd of nearly a dozen chicks blinked in the strong light, then hearing the mother’s gleeful clucking, ran to the spot where she was pretending to peck, and pecked in earnest.

“Fearfully and wonderfully made,” said the old man to himself; and the Little Boy was listening. “Nae sooner are they born than they begin tae rin aboot; and they ken hoo tae peck

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up their crumbs withoot learnin'. If ye'll watch them for a whilie, lad, ye'll see them scutter aff to shelter when the shadow o' a crow flits ower the yaird. And they ken the way til their bed withoot askin', and dinna wait for ony hot-water bottle. Is it no wonderful that they ken a' thae things withoot a book?

"But mind ye," went on the old man, "there's some things that puzzle thae little chicks. They canna mak oot hoo it is the doves can get up til their coop under the hoose roof. That is higher than they can jump, and they are great at jumpin'. When they creep through the hedge intil the field, and see cows wi' fower legs they wonder hoo the things can remember which o' the fower legs to move, and hoo they can keep them a' tae their turns. Twa legs is grand, but fower maun surely be a scunner. And ye'll see them standin' by the roadside when the farm horses are passin'. They canna understand hoo it is that the horses can mak sich a noise wi' their hoofs. Ye'll see the chicks tryin' tae mak a noise wi' their feet, but man, ye

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couldna hear their stampin' if ye had an ear as big as an elephant's !

"But their wonder o' wonders is Mistress Sanders' apron. She comes out in the mornin' and then in the evenin' and a' she has to dae is to pet her hand intil her lap and it rains corn. They hae been tryin' to find that apron so as they can mak it rain corn a' day. But," added the old man bending down and whispering, "it's no mony fowk, and fewer chickens, that can get ower Mistress Sanders."

The Little Boy knew that only too well, since she had caught him coming in with muddy boots, and then standing on the muddy marks he had made on the floor, to hide them from her keen eyes.

"Yon big goose o' mine," Sanders went on, "is the thing that dings every brood o' chicks born i' this gairden. To begin wi', ye see she's bigger than the mother-hen ; and it scandalises them that onything wi' feathers should be bigger than her. And there's ae thing they never say, though they think o' it quietly by theirsels.

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They never mention it til ane anither, because it is sich a terrible heresy, and it's the thing they're tremblin' lest they should be at last compelled to believe by the persistence o' facts. And that is that if by an ill stroke o' Providence the big cock were, for a moment, to find himsel' back to back wi' that goose, the goose wad be seen to be bigger than him.

“‘Hiss ! hiss !’ The goose stretches oot her neck, and the stray dog pretends that he never meant to come there. ‘Hiss ! hiss !’ she shoots at the chicks, and they scurry in a’ directions. But the hour of the goose’s glory is when she waddles oot o’ the gate and doon til the pond on the roadside. The little army o’ chicks follow to see the wonder she can dae, and dae every day, and sometimes afore breakfast. Dae ye ken what that might be ?”

The Little Boy could not guess.

“Weel, that’s tae swim on the pond. Ye’ll hear them speir at ane anither hoo it’s done. Some of the boy chicks mak oot that they ken weel but are no gaen tae tell. And the girl

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chicks dare the boy chicks to dae it, but naebody does it just then. Some say they'll dae it when naebody's lookin'. This auld hen'll try tae keep thae new chicks awa frae the pond. Shall I tell ye why? The last brood gae her the maist humblin' meenute o' her life. It's the meenute that every mither dreads, the meenute when her bairns ask her, 'Mither, can *you* dae it?' and she has tae own that she canna.

"'Michty me,' said ae little chick wha was gaen to be a fine big cock some day, 'I'm no afeard. Let's speir at the goose hoo tae dae it, and then we can a' swim the pond.' So they asked.

"And dae ye ken what the goose said?"

"Na, I couldna guess," answered the Little Boy.

"Weel, the goose said that the question was just too reediculous for words, and it wasna worth explainin'; for onybody wi' a thimbleful o' sense could see, that a' ye had to dae was to sit doon on the water, and wish yersel at the ither side, and there ye were.

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“Na, laddie, the goose couldna explain it ; she could just dae it. And when yer Sabbath Skule Teacher tells ye that ye'll grow up a guid man, if ye grieve when ye dae wrong and look til our Saviour, he canna explain how it is that this maks a guid man, but he knows that it just does.

“I'm thinkin' that the wye it's easy for the goose to sit doon on the water and just sail awa is because God made it so. And perhaps that is why little boys can sail intil a good life by bein' sorry and trustin' in Jesus ; because God made little boys that way.”

XI

THE HOUSE THAT MISSED ITS CHANCE

NO one in Padan Aram remembered the Old Missionary as he was when a lad.

The fact is, that he never lived there till he became old, and returned from India to live in retirement. It was his mother who lived there as a lass : and even she left the little place while quite young, to get married.

But the boy had heard so many pleasant stories of the place from the lips of his mother, when she was in reminiscent mood, that he persuaded himself, without the slightest difficulty, that it was his native town. When he lived under the tropical sun, he and his brave wife told each other, that when they retired they would spend their last days quietly at her home

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in the sunny south of England. It was she who broke the contract ; slipping off from the hot lands of the East, almost without notice, to the Heaven she lived for. When the Old Missionary found himself thus bereft, he bethought him of the village of his mother's girlhood, and took refuge there.

The joy of Mr. Stewart, the Minister, at his coming was great. He found in this veteran a kindred spirit ; and few things delighted him more than to saunter up to the house of the Rev. Elihu Mathieson, retired, and get him to shine an Eastern lamp on some Scriptural incident.

There was a pleasant and comfortable seat on the little green plot in the Missionary's garden. No garden seat in the kingdom was more occupied than that seat. Summer and winter, if only it be not raining, Mr. Mathieson could be seen by the curious, sitting there.

“Are ye no afraid o' the cauld ?” some sympathetic visitor would enquire when she found him there in the keen air, with the snow covering the country for miles round. “Is it

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no the heat ye're fond o' after living in thae hot places a' yer life?"

"Woman," he'd say, "for forty years I hae been pantin' for guid strong clean air and hinna got it. But it's here, and I can never get enough o't. The air o' Scotland is as guid as its people."

"This is a real fortunate hoose o' yours," said the Minister, as he took his seat in the garden one sunny afternoon.

"How so?" enquired Mr. Mathieson.

"Look ye, it stands clear a roond. There's the morning sun for its east side, and it warms itself for the night on its west side, and through the day it has the sun frae the south, and the north windows look up the Glen. Some hooses are mair fortunate than ither, and this is ane o' the fortunate anes. When I write a book, it will no be aboot callants and their loves, but aboot hooses and their experiences."

"Ye're richt," said the Missionary.

And then his mind went wandering through the mansions of the rulers of India, the airy houses of her missionaries and the hovels of her

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peasants. At last it came to a stop near a house by a great wood in a remote district of Britain's great Dependency.

"I could tell you o' an unfortunate hoose," murmured the Missionary, "of a hoose that missed its chance."

The Minister waited.

"It's mony years syne. I was livin' on the bank o' a great and beautiful river. Once in the year we saw the ships frae Dundee lying waitin' for their cargoes o' tea and jute alongside the quay. That river was God's highway into the Hills, and man hadna had time to mak a better. Three tides up the river and a nicht and a day o' rowing, brocht ye til a country that was administered by a native king. I had been up travelling in his country, tryin' to spread the Glad Tidings, when it came to ma mind that it micht be a thing well pleasin' to God for me to speak some words o' Revelation to the king as weel as til his subjects.

"I wasna just what ye wad ca' weel dressed for gaen to see a king : and what was mair, after

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sleeping in ma claes on the bottom o' the boat at nichts, what I had werena in very guid order, and the collar o' my cotton shirt wasna presentable. But then, mark ye, I had a white face and was o' British birth. That coonts. I washed ma shirt in the river and laid it on the mat coverin' o' the boat to dry, while we travelled doon towards the king's hoose. The hoose was awa up the bank and hid amang the trees. I sent up ane o' the preachers to request permission to see His Honour, and, if agreeable, to exhibit some incidents frae the ministry of our Saviour by means o' the lantern I had wi' me. There was no reply. We waited a long time but yet no answer. Then word arrived : 'His Honour will receive the Englishman'; and then before I was out of the boat the message, 'His Honour won't.'

"I was inclined to get awa, but was loath to leave the message undelivered ; so when at last it cam twilight, I told the preachers to end our uncertainty by takin' up the lantern and settin' up the sheet in the village adjacent to the king's

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residence. When I arrived I foond that they had put the things up in the court of the king's hoose. I asked it it were wise so to do, and they replied that in etiquette there was naething else for it. Noo a' this had taken hoors. The villagers were gathered. We waited for His Honour. No appearance ; no word.

“‘The king is evidently displeased,’ I said. ‘Tak the things into the village where the peasants may see and hear.’ No sooner had we begun to speak to the peasants in the village, than messengers arrived from the king's hoose with instructions to disperse the villagers. A Samson of the king's attendants drove the people away. Yet some of them peepit roond the corners o' the hooses to see the wonderful things : and even Samson forgot his instructions momentarily in his interest in the pictures. But we were in no mood to prolong oor stay, so after a wee whilie, we took oor things wi' us and went doon to our boats, and so slowly and silently down the river homewards. And night fell on the royal house.

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“Then the king said, ‘It was an indignity that the Englishman should leave my court for the place of peasants. Never have I bathed so quickly nor eaten with such haste as I did, to meet this honourable Englishman ; and before I can appear he is gone.’ So speak men that hide refusal under words.

“The chance of the hoose is past. There is light in the huts o’ citizens o’ that country. One peasant tak’s til anither the licht o’ the Good News. On hillside and by clear sandy stream the light is shining ; but the king’s hoose is dark.”

“It wad hae been a grand thing to hae taken Jesus intil the hoose o’ the king,” said the Minister.

“So it would, Mr. Stewart ; so it would,” replied the Missionary, “and that I might hae done. For this I see, that the Lord is willin’ to gae intil ony hoose, the hoose o’ priests or peasants, and there’s nae reason to think that he wad hae been unwilling to gae intil that hoose. But there’s ae thing I’ve noticed aboot the Lord Jesus when He’s in India.”

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“What might that be?” enquired the Minister.

“Just this: that while He’ll gae intil every hoose, He winna bide in ony hoose whar there’s no a penitent.”

“Man,” replied the Minister, “that’s the kind o’ hoose He bides in, in Padan Aram. They’re the fortunate hooses in Padan Aram: thae hooses wha hae sunshine on the ootside and Jesus inside.”

The two men held each other by the hand while they prayed for the king’s house, that sad house, that had missed its chance.

XII

WHILE WE ARE WAITING

SANDERS had been away visiting his relatives in Edinburgh. He brought back his little grandson with him. The boy wanted to see his grandmother in Padan Aram. That done, the next most important thing was to get a sight of the tree in Sanders' garden on which apples grew. The little lad had seen apples in shops and apples on a plate on the sideboard at home, but Sanders had told him that in Padan Aram there was a tree on which apples came of themselves. And that tree was in his grandfather's garden.

It was very unfortunate for the apple investigation that the time of the child's visit was the New Year. It was the best time to see his grandmother of course, but the worst time to see the

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apple tree. The apple tree was bare and wizened. It could not be compared either in size or appearance with the trees in the public gardens in Princes Street. And the boy's expectation had pictured something more worthy than what Sanders had to show him.

"Whar's the tree on which the apples come, grandfather?" said the laddie.

The old man pointed to a little gnarled tree standing naked and shivering in the garden. The lad was disappointed with the tree's appearance, but he was glad that he had now seen something which his small sister had not seen.

When it came towards evening the laddie had an experiment on hand. In the early darkness of the winter afternoon, he crept out into the garden and hid in the shadow of the wall and watched to see the apples come. "Did they spring up out of the ground and hold on to the branches with their thin arms, or did an angel come down from heaven and tie them in their places?"

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No angel stirred abroad that night in Sanders' garden, nor did the apples venture from their hiding places underground.

"Na, na," said Sanders, on hearing the little lad's complaint. "It needs the dew and the rain to make the apples soft and juicy."

Early in the morning the child was in the garden under the mysterious tree, holding up his little cup to catch the drops of moisture as they fell from the bare branches.

He put the cup to his lips and tasted the water with great care, smacking his lips, and flooding his palate with it, as experts sample Indian teas. Then his face fell and he cried, "There is no taste of apples."

"Na, na," said Sanders, "it needs the sunshine on the tree to mak the apples roond and rosy and sweet. God's blessed sunshine."

So the little fellow took his prism out into the sunshine. At his home with this same prism he had hunted out the rainbow of red and blue and green and yellow that was hiding in the sunlight in his Edinburgh garden. In Sanders' garden with

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that same magic glass he would hunt out the apples.

But no, there was the rainbow, the many-coloured rainbow, in his grandfather's garden as in his own, but not a trace of apples.

Sanders was grieved for the lad, and, secretly, was grieved for himself. It was he who had mentioned the apples. Had he said nothing, nothing would have been said. But he had promised the child a sight of the tree, and now could not show him the apples. And though the lad stayed there a whole week and watched carefully for their coming, no apples ever came.

“Weel, Jeems,” said the old man, when he had put the little lad in charge of the guard at Farkeld, labelled with his address on his bonnet, and with his railway ticket sewn on to the lapel of his jacket, and with repeated instructions to wait on the platform at Edinburgh, just where he got out of the train, till his mother and small sister came for him, “Weel, Jeems,” said the old man, “I’m hopin’ that ye’ve had a happy holiday wi’ yer

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grandmither and me. We've been awfie pleased to hae ye, and we hope ye'll want to come back again soon. But aboot thae apples I'm gye vexed. Ye hae seen the tree as I tellt ye ; but man, I'm awfie grieved that I have na been able to show ye ony apples ontilt. But I'm writin' til yer faither to let ye come back in the summer vacation. That will be the apple season, and then ye'll see the apples on yon tree, and hae as mony o' them to eat as ye want.

“ But there's ae thing I ask ye, and that is, that through the spring months and through the lang summer months while yer waitin' to come back, ye'll try to believe that I have na been leein' til ye. The apples dae come on that tree. I canna prove it til ye : and there's nae hint onywhar that they are comin'. Ye'll find it hard to believe that yer grandfather has been tellin' the truth, but ye maun just try yer best to believe. And if noo and then ye doobt ma word, I'll just hae to pet up wi' it, for ye'll hae some reason. But, lad, I'll tell ye agen, sign or nae sign, proof or nae proof, whether I live or whether I dee, there

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will be apples on that tree when the time o' apples comes."

When the little lad got home his little sister was very anxious to know whether he had seen the tree on which the apples grow. He nodded assent, but refused to say anything on the subject. He was ashamed to confess that he had not seen the apples, and trembled at the dark doubt of his grandfather which lurked in his heart.

But when September came, after great delay, though indeed it was only the usual delay, the little boy was with his grandfather again in Padan Aram for the holidays. There in the garden stood that old wizened tree now a veritable picture of fruitfulness. The child clapped his hands at the sight of it: and on the very afternoon that he arrived, before he had his tea, Sanders took him into the garden, and putting a ladder up against the tree reached down the largest and rosiest apple that he could find, and gave it to the boy.

Almost before he had said his "Thank you," the laddie had his teeth in the reddest side of

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that apple, and with his mouth full, was crying,
“Grandfather, this is good : this is good.”

“Ay, good,” murmured Sanders, as he staggered towards the cottage under the weight of the ladder, “good out o’ that wee twisted tree after weary waitin’. After the sun and after the winter, wi’ the help o’ everything, a’ Nature conspirin’ together for the sake o’ this tree, and the sake o’ good.”

And when he sat down on the bench to recover his breath he said half aloud, “And the little lad couldna find ony trace o’ its coming.”

XIII

THE PLENISHING O' WIDOW DUNDAS

THE Elder returned from his work at the usual time. His clothes were red from the clay of the quarry. No one would take him for an elder now, who had only seen him in his long black coat and lum hat on Sabbath. He washed his face and hands at the well in front of the row of cottages, and went in to his tea.

He had scarcely sat down when his wife said to him, "Trouble has come to Widow Dundas."

The Elder did not ask what the trouble was'; he guessed it. He rose from the table, leaving his teacup still full, and the hot toast for those who had appetites, and went off to the house of the Widow. Mrs. Dundas had been a widow

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scarcely a year yet. Her husband Joseph coughed himself into the kirkyard only the previous winter.

The Elder sat down on a bench by the window with his bonnet on his knee. The Widow was sobbing : the cradle was still : her foot was not even on the rocker : and on the pillow was a little dead face.

They sat in silence, those two—the Elder and the weeping mother. In that sacred silence the wild sobs began to moderate.

“So the little lass has gaen awa,” said the Elder.

“Awa ! awa !” came the echo of a broken heart.

“What way did she gang, the wee lamb ?” asked the Elder.

“What way ?” queried the woman, “she just gaed awa withoot sayin’ that she was gaen.”

“And which way ?” repeated Ingles.

The woman looked up in doubt of his meaning. Slowly she recovered herself, then she said passionately—

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“I think that she just turned roond and went after her faither.”

There was no sound for minutes but the clack of the neighbour's loom, then the Elder said—

“Ay, lass, that heavenly mansion o' yours is being rarely furnished.”

“Furnished?” cried the woman, “furnished? how furnished?”

“Weel, ye havena got muckle here. It must be somewhere. I canna think whar it can be if it's no in yer heavenly hoose. There are rich things and poor things for us a', and you have had yer sad things here. That is what Abraham said aboot the poor man wha lay at the rich man's door. The rich man had his good things in his earthly hoose, and found his poor things yonder. I'm thinkin', lass, that yonder hoose o' yours has mony a thing in it that ye hae missed here.”

The woman looked at him.

“And, lass, ye hae been layin' up some things in that hoose to yersel. Ye needna shak yer

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head. I've seen it. Dae ye think I dinna ken hoo ye went without a new jacket wi' bugles on't, last winter, so that Joseph micht hae a warm woolly waistcoat to stop his hoast? Whar's the jacket, woman? I ask ye that."

The Widow moaned in reply.

"I havena stood at the Plate a' these years, and seen yer offerin's to God and his kirk, without learnin' that yon hoose on the green slope o' the heavenly hill was bein' furnished wi' pleasant things. Na, na! And mind ye, a guid woman canna lose a bairnie, neither can a guid God. Bairns are ane o' the things that canna be lost, like cups o' cauld water, and sich like."

The woman laid her hand on the little head beside her, to make sure that it was there.

"Dinna fret, ma brave lass. I can hear the bairn laughin'. She's playin' at the door. And Joseph's laughin' too. Na, he's no coughin'. I'm sure it's laughin' that he is. He's pretendin' to lose the wee lass oot o' the door, and syne he's findin' her laughin' amang the floers i' the

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gairden. Woman, ye hae been furnishin' a grand hoose for yer dearies."

The Widow put her hands before her eyes to hold the vision in her head, and press it down, a fadeless picture, into her heart.

"Rita," said the Elder, as he turned to leave, "ye'll no be withoot a freend sae lang as ye bide in Padan Aram: and ye'll hae freends forbye when ye turn doon the road after Joseph and the bonnie bairn."

The Elder put on his bonnet and went home. All night long the Widow sat by the still cradle. Great clouds of grief came stealing over her weary soul; but rousing herself she chased them away with the sight of those things invisible, which the Elder had brought to her view. He had said nothing to her about Jesus. It was Jesus Who said it. She endured as seeing Him Who is invisible.

XIV

DUTHIE'S DEVIL

THE Minister was in the middle of his sermon preparation. He had just written the sentence, "The Devil is that person who spends time in making men sin, and eternity in tormenting them for doing it." He leaned back in his chair. On review, that seemed too neat a sentence to be true. That the Devil tempted men to sin, there could be no manner of doubt ; but on what evidence did the assertion rest that he was the Great Tormentor ?

From his boyhood he had heard the Devil represented as the Master in hell. Score of stories which he had heard, assumed this. Was there anything in the New Testament to support it ? He recalled many texts. Some of them

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seemed to suggest that he was not the Tormentor ; rather one of the tormented. But perhaps he had not got all the evidence. It was a point on which the few books to which he referred were silent. His mind was in a knot. He took up his hat. He would just walk down the road. He owed the Stonebreaker an apology for having passed him earlier in the week without speaking. Besides, he would ask Duthie what he thought on the subject.

The old Stonebreaker was breaking stones. There may be stonebreakers who are either just going to break stones or who have just broken them, but Duthie was, as a rule, in the middle of the task any time you passed.

As soon as the Minister came within hearing distance, he shouted, "Duthie, man, is there a Deevil ? "

Duthie straightened his back and looked all round.

"Where ? " he cried.

"Oh, not here," the Minister said, "ony-whar ? "

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“There’s no ony doobt aboot that, Maister Stewart.”

“You dinna find ony deeficulty in believin’ that, then ?”

“Na, ma deeficulty is no in believin’ that there’s a Deevil : ma deeficulty is in believin’ that there’s only ane. By what I’ve seen in oor little toon this last sixty year, I’m inclined to think that there’s not only a he-deevil, but that there’s a she-deevil as weel, and three or fower o’ the neuter gender.”

“I’ve been hearin’,” continued the Minister, “that some o’ the great preachers up in London, dinna believe in a Deevil ava.”

“Micht that be so ?” queried the old man.

“But ye canna deny,” persisted the Minister, “that naebody ever sees the Deevil.”

“Naebody : only drunken bodies. And their word is no to be relied on. But there’s reason for that. The Deevil is aye hidin’. He’s no that guid lookin’ that he cares to show himsel’. Na, he’s aye hidin’. Ye’ll remember Job ? The Lord Almichty saw the Deevil when they were

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speakin' aboot Job, but depend on't, Job never had a glimmer o' him. When yon wild robbers carried aff Job's camels, the Deevil was hidin' ahent in the dust ; and when the wind took hawd o' the fower corners o' the hoose and pulled it doon on the heads o' his sons and dochters, nane 'o thae puir bairns caught sicht o' the Deevil ; and when the sair trachled man heard a voice sayin', 'Curse God and dee,' he lookit up and saw naebody but his wife. The Deevil was hidin' ahent her. Na, ye maunna bide till ye see him afore ye resist him, or ye'll never win ower him."

"Man, Duthie, I'm afeard he's ane too mony for poor fowk like you and me."

"He's aye dangerous, but whiles he's mair dangerous. It's no when he comes straicht at ye, that ye need be frichtened : it's when he passes ye by withoot lookin', as if he dinna see ye, that ye hae to watch him. When ye say til yersel', 'Thank the Lord, he's gone,' that's the time he'll be creepin' back to dae ye a mischief. He's like Rob Chalmers' dog. Ye'll ken Rob Chalmers

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the rat-catcher? Weel, he cam past last week, and the dog was wi' him. It was the very mornin' Marget had said to me, 'John, ma man, ye've gotten something special for yer denner the day.' What dae ye think it was? It was just a wee bittie salt fish. Hoots ay, salt fish is better nor bread and cheese. Cheese fills yer mooth, but salt fish fills yer nose as weel. Noo, when Chalmers cam doon the road, ma denner was aneath the hedge, and I was watchin' that dog o' his. I ken that dog for a slinkin' thief. So I just took the opportunity o' takin' oot ma snuff mull, and keepin' an eye on that fower-legged deevil. The wind was ahent him, and he trotted past wi' his tail ower his back; and when I saw that the danger was ower, I went on wi' ma stanes. But as soon as that thief had gotten till the windward, if he didna get a sniff o' ma salt fish, and came sneakin' alang the bottom o' the ditch, when I wasna lookin', and the next thing I saw was ma denner tearin' awa to Farkeld."

The Minister could not help laughing, Minister though he was. He sobered, however,

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when Duthie looked at him enquiringly. He covered his confusion by saying, "That mind's me o' what the Saviour said, 'If the strong man had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken into.'"

"And the Saviour was richt," added the Stonebreaker. "The deeficulty is to find oot the Deevil's hoors. There's no ony man in Padan Aram kens them. They're no marked on the almanack ; and, man, when he's on the nicht shift, he's terrible."

When the Minister got back to his desk, and saw his half-finished discourse, it suddenly dawned on him that he had never asked Duthie about his problem after all. He did not know now, whether, in hell, it was the Devil that punished others, or was himself punished like other common sinners. So he ran his pen through the sentence which had raised his doubts, and filled the page with Duthie's discourse instead.

XV

ACQUENT WI' GOD

"S^ANDERS, are you acquent wi' God?" asked the Little Boy.

"What maks ye speir sich a question?" growled the old man.

"Weel, I was hearin' ae man say til anither wha was in trouble, that he had just better gae awa doon and hae a crack wi' you, because ye were weel acquent wi' God."

"Maybe I am, and maybe I'm no," Sanders replied.

"Can onybody be acquent wi' God?" asked the Little Boy.

"I should like you to be, laddie, for I'm awfie fond o' you," said Sanders.

"I'm afeard o' Him," answered the Little Boy. "Besides, He michtna like me. I

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wish I could find oot something aboot Him first."

"Are ye afeard o' the Minister?" Sanders asked.

"I'm no afeard o' him noo, but I aince was."

"Hoo was that?" asked Sanders.

"I canna say, but just I was afeard."

"How is it ye're no afeard noo?"

"It was this way," explained the Little Boy. "Aince when ma mither wasna weel, he cam to see her, and he didna bring his pulpit wi' him, and he didna hae on his black goon, and he didna thump the Bible aince. No, no aince. And ma mither wasna afeard, so I wasna."

"That wark's done," said Sanders as he finished polishing the edge of a boot-sole with his little hot iron, and flung the boot on to the stone floor. "And bless me if the sun isna shinin', and it's God's shiny sun. And yon hills if they're no dancin' wi' joy, and they're God's hills. Can ye hear the finches chirpin', and mercy me! if they're no God's finches. Come

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awa, laddie, and let's gae oot and see God's happy earth."

The Little Boy put on his bonnet.

"Michty me, laddie! if ye hanna gotten on ane o' God's bonnets," exclaimed Sanders.

The Little Boy pulled the blue bonnet from his head anxiously. He examined the red toorie and the long tails of it, then last of all the white thistle with the gold top, on the side of the bonnet. This was proof conclusive; for his father brought him that thistle from Edinburgh to be taken off old bonnets and put on new ones, world without end, and then to go to his descendants. So the Little Boy assured Sanders that the bonnet was undoubtedly his own.

"That's guid," said Sanders as he took a deep breath. "We're fortunate. God's wind is blowin'."

The Little Boy wondered how Sanders knew which was God's wind.

"Does everything belong tae God?" asked the Little Boy.

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"If everything doesna belang tae God, wha does everything belang til?"

The Little Boy did not know.

Presently they came to where a man was working in his front garden. It was the Elder. Sanders stopped and leaned on the gate. The Little Boy looked through it.

"Man, ye've made the roses grow fine in yer gairden," said Sanders.

"I wonder at ye, Sanders," replied the Elder, "e'en the bairn there kens that it's God Wha maks the roses grow in ma gairden."

"Are ye sure?" asked Sanders.

"If no, wha is it?" rejoined the Elder.

"Tell him, laddie," said Sanders.

But the Little Boy was afraid to venture into a discussion between two such veterans. He was secretly of the opinion, however, that the Elder must also be well acquainted with God, if God made roses grow in his garden.

"Are ye gaen in to cry on ma mither?" asked the Little Boy as they stopped outside his mother's house.

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They went in.

“It’s a fine day,” said Sanders. The Little Boy’s mother agreed on that point with Sanders, as she did on several others in the course of the visit.

“Ye’ll tak a bite: a wee bit scone, and a drink o’ milk,” said the Little Boy’s mother.

“Has God gien ye scones and milk, woman?” said Sanders in a startled tone. “I mind that it only says ‘bread’ in the Prayer.”

“God’s aye better nor His promise,” said the Little Boy’s mother. “Mark ye, He’s not only gien me scones and milk, but a wee lad to help me eat them,” and then she added with a sly glance at the old man, “and ae guid freend at least.”

While the Little Boy’s mother was getting the milk out of the pantry, Sanders whispered to him, “Laddie, wha is it maks guid mithers?”

“Wha does?” repeated the Little Boy.

“If it isna God, wha is it?” answered Sanders.

“That was a braw verse ye learned the Little Boy yon nicht,” said the Little Boy’s mother.

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“ Whatna ane was that ? ” asked Sanders.

“ Say it til Sanders, laddie.”

The Little Boy repeated it—

“ If Jesus Christ was sent
To save us from our sin,
And kindly teach us to repent,
We should at once begin.”

The old man said it over to himself, then turning to the Little Boy's mother he said, “ Wha was it sent Jesus to save the laddie frae his sin ? ”

“ Why, Sanders, man,” said she, “ what maks ye speir. If it wasna God, wha was it ? ”

“ I'll no tak the laddie ony farther,” said Sanders. “ I'll just leave him here. I've been takin' him roond the toon to mak him acquent wi' God.”

As Sanders went down the garden path the Little Boy called after him, “ Sanders, I'm no afeard o' God noo.”

XVI

DOES GOD THEN SIT DOWN?

INGLES had carefully studied the question which he brought to the Minister this evening. The Minister had not. Ingles never gave the Minister notice of the subject for consideration. It was necessary to take him unawares, so as to make the discussion more equal.

Mr. Stewart knew that the Elder had come for discussion. There could be no business. Business was at low ebb, as was news. So he waited for the Elder to open.

“What has God done for our salvation?” submitted the Elder, as he took his accustomed seat by the fire.

The Minister remained quiet for the Elder to answer his own question. This he proceeded

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to do as by ancient right. After his accustomed manner he was brief.

“Weel,” said the Elder, “ye canna be saved withoot a Saviour, so He gave us Jesus; and ye canna ken aboot the Saviour unless ye’re tellt, and so He gave us the New Testament; and ye canna live like a saved man withoot life, so He gave us of His ain; and ye canna keep them that love the Saviour apart, so He gave us the Church. What mair could He dae?”

As an indication that he had finished, the Elder drew out his snuff-box and took a lengthy pinch. Then he spread his large red handkerchief on his knee, and waited for the sneeze.

The Minister sat back in his chair and looked across the fireplace at the Elder.

“When God has done all this, does He then sit down? Does He dae naething then, but wait for sinners to come and seek salvation?”

Having formulated the question so, the Minister was silent for quite a long space. He was casting up in his mind whether he ought or ought not. At length, with the sigh

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of a man who felt himself justified in speaking, he said, “ I’ll tell ye aboot Boaz Blair.”

The Elder knew about Boaz Blair just as well as the Minister ; but he was interested to see how he would use the simple story of their dead friend to answer the question, “ Does God then sit down ? ”

“ Boaz was a sober man well into middle life. His declension showed itself first in his gaen tae ‘The Malt Shovel.’ In those days ‘The Malt Shovel’ was a rude inn, and ae rude inn maks mony dreary hames. Boaz creepit in, early in the evening, and staggered oot when decent fowk were in their beds. His wife, Patience, took to workin’ i’ the fields while the bairns were at school, and weepin’ when they were in bed. Boaz was no withoot a sense o’ shame, and mony a time wished himsel’ back in his happy sober days. But the only thing he did was to change his inn.

“ ‘ Ye ought tae hae married a better man nor me, lass,’ he said ae nicht, as he sat in softened mood by the kitchen fire.

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“Patience looked at the little daguerreotype over the mantelpiece. It was a wee picture o’ the wedded pair taken long years before. She looked at it, and then at Boaz. The tears cam tae her een ; and she sobbed oot as if her heart was breaking, ‘Boaz, lad, I did.’

“Boaz determined to do better ; but all he did was to change his drink.

“Then ye’ll mind hoo when months were makin’ years, Boaz comin’ hame ae stormy nicht, slippit aff the road into the quarry.”

“I mind it weel,” replied the Elder, “for it was masel’ that foond Boaz there, when I went tae ma wark i’ the mornin’.”

“He had hurt his back. For ae lang year he never moved oot o’ his bed, and then they moved him to the kirk-yaird. That was a lang year, but it was a happy ane ; that year o’ pain and tenderness. Boaz was sobered by compulsion. Yon were days o’ hard wark for Patience, but days o’ peace and o’ a heavenly licht.

“‘I’m awfie glad to see ye,’ Boaz wad whiles say to me when I called, ‘and yer prayers dae

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me muckle guid, and God will hear ye, that I'm sure, but, man, ma hope is brightest when I hear the wife pray for me ; the Almighty canna deny sae brave a lass.'

"Boaz had just ae prayer, but he prayed it mony times, 'Oh, God, forgie me for her dear sake.' "

"That's no Bible prayer," interjected the Elder.

"No," rejoined the Minister, "it's no, but it was a broken-hearted cry for help, and that is better nor ony ither prayer. I hae nae doobt but that the Lord forgave his broken-hearted chield ; but for wha's sake it's for Him to say.

"Noo tell me," said the Minister, "when God had given the Saviour and the Good News and a' the ither things we ken aboot, for the salvation o' this poor man Boaz, did God then sit doon ? Not He. He gave that puir man the love o' a true soul, the prayers o' a faithful wife, a lang year o' quiet in his bed, and in his strange Providence flung him ower the quarry, that He might by all means save his soul.

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“Ye'll mind the text on his grave-stane ?
Patience asked me if it was richt to alter a Bible
text. What say ye, Elder?” asked the Minister.

The Elder made no reply, for he was of a
different mind on the matter from the Minister.

“Weel, I thocht she micht, and tellt her so.
That's hoo it stands there as it is, and if ony
man says it's no Scripture, I say it's good honest
truth. ‘That He micht by all means save
one.’ ”

As the two friends walked through the Manse
garden towards the gate, the Elder said—

“Man, I never knew that God was sae busy
in Padan Aram.”

XVII

A CHURCH-GOING CONSPIRACY

THE Elder had gone up to see the Precentor about a tune which was not in the Psalm Book. He was horrified to find that the tune was in manuscript, and more horrified to discover that Lunan had made the tune himself, and had dared to sing one of the Psalms of David to it in the kirk. The Precentor let in a little light on the subject of tunes in general and their manufacture, and the Elder's agitation gently subsided.

That settled, the Elder wanted to hear all the facts about the Rev. Jamie Frazer's Conspiracy. The facts were in existence. They were scattered about Padan Aram, one in this house and two or three in another house, but the

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Elder shrewdly suspected that the Precentor had a copy of them all.

“They’re no even in manuscript,” suggested the Precentor, with a twinkle.

“As ye weel ken,” began Lunan, “when the Rev. Jamie was ill and the lad frae Edinburgh was nursin’ him, strange things began to happen in Jamie Frazer’s pew. It was occupied by a laddie, and by a different laddie, every Sabbath. Aye by ae laddie only, and that a strange laddie. Muckle wonderin’ was the result. It was a chief topic amang little groups on the way hame frae kirk. Men and little girls were equally interested and equally mysterious on the subject. ‘Why was it that the laddies cam?’ They were laddies wha never cam til the kirk, or went to ony ither for the matter o’ that. They were in Jamie’s seat, so it maun hae some connection wi’ Jamie: and he maun hae gotten them to come. Naebody else could. And hoo did he manage it? No ane o’ the lads wad gie a word o’ explanation.

“The laddie wha served on ae Sabbath was

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there next Sabbath ; but no in Jamie's pew. He was up i' the loft watchin' his successor.

" It couldna be that Jamie was afeard o' losin' his Psalm Book. Jamie liked to dae that. He whiles said that takin' his Psalm Book wasna stealin', and tried to prove it. His Psalm Book was aye a big print ane, and a new ane. It was ane o' thae big kind, wi' one cover and twa insides. Ye've gotten ane o' that kind yersel', Elder, so ye ken the kind : wi' the music on the tap half and the print on the bottom half, and a' the leaves cut across, so that ye can hae ony tune to ony Psalm open in front o' ye. Man, it's wonderfu' what a lot o' Psalms 'Martyrs' will gang til. But Jamie never could lose that Psalm Book, try as hard as he would. He left it in a' sorts o' places, and in weel nigh every pew i' the kirk. He never pet his name intilt, but it aye came back til him. Then he tried a new way. Whenever he spied onybody wha had forgotten their book, he lent them his. Or if there was a visitor, then that visitor micht hae his book. 'Na, he wadna hae it back.

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He'd like a new ane, if they wad be sae guid as to keep that ane. It went agen his conscience to burn a Psalm Book, or to hae it used for wrappin' up candles, so perhaps they'd just dae him the kindness to keep it, and let him get a new ane.'

"It couldna be that he was afeard that the Minister wad depart frae his orthodoxy when Jamie wasna there. He kent weel that a' thing i' that line was safe while Duthie was on hand.

"It might be, though, that the Minister wad say something oot o' the ordinary, for, man, he is awfie oreeginal, is the Minister: and Jamie's a birkie wha's aye on the watch to get a grup o' the Minister somewhar, so as he can hae a discussion wi' him."

"Jamie was known, on two occasions at least, to have made the Minister modify or qualify something that he had said.

"It might be that Jamie was gettin' thegither a stock o' thae sayin's so as to be ready for the Minister when he was weel agen.

"Naebody could bottom it.

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"It was a lang time afore I could mak it oot masel, and there werena mony wha kent mair aboot it nor me. But twa o' thae strange lads had guid voices, so I asked them to come til the Singing Practices, and promised them places in the Singing Seat, if they did weel. It was frae them that I learned what was missin' i' ma coonts. And when I pet it a' thegither it cam oot this way.

"When the Rev. Jamie was lyin' i' his bed through the lang days, and saw his wark amang the no-kirk fowk no bein' done, he began to wonder what he could dae. His mind kept runnin' on the laddies in Padan Aram wha didna gae to kirk or Sabbath school. He kent mony o' them, and kent them weel. So he sent for ane o' thae lads. 'He was gye trachled,' he said, 'and he wondered if the lad could help him oot. He had naebody to tak his collection to the kirk. There were as mony as fower silver shillin's lyin' there on the mantelpiece, twa Sabbath's collections. Wad the lad come on Sabbath morn and tak ane and pet it

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in the plate as he went in?’ The laddie didna like. A shillin’ was ower muckle for him to pet in the plate. Fowk wad wonder if he stole it, and Jamie wadna let him say whar it cam frae. Jamie suggested that he should hide it under a bawbee. ‘They wadna stick thegither, the bawbee and the shillin’.’ After some thought the lad turned awa. The hapenny and the shillin’ were bein’ experimented wi’. There was a soond o’ spittin’, and the laddie declared that he had foond a way.

“Then he didna ken whar to sit in the kirk when he had gotten in. The ither laddies michtna like him to sit wi’ them. That was just what Jamie wanted. ‘Ye’ll gae to my seat o’ course,’ said Jamie.

“So that point was settled.

“In this way there cam to be a relay o’ strange laddies in Jamie’s seat. Each appeared early in the week in Jamie’s bedroom, and was sworn to secrecy, on a wet finger wiped dry and drawn across the throat. This was represented to Jamie as bein’ the maist bindin’ oath on the

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lads he was dealin' wi', in their present stage of savagery. And the oath was kept.

“But Jamie wasna done wi' them yet. He guared ilka laddie come back til him wi' the Minister's text. Jamie wrote it doon, but ‘he'd awfie like it hung on his bed-rail.’ ‘Laddie,’ he'd say, ‘but it's awfie dull here: if only I had thae texts printed and painted, and hung up here whar I could see them.’ So ilka lad borrowed Jamie's box o' paints and brushes, and fetched him the twa texts o' the Sabbath on which he was Jamie's messenger; and there was a regular gallery o' Gospel truth hangin' on the bed-rail.

“And what is mair, when the Rev. Jamie got back to the kirk, there was a pew full o' laddies, and strange to say twa or three lassies, up in the loft ilka Sabbath. We ca' them Jamie's bairns.”

XVIII

SANDERS BECOMES A MISSIONARY

“ **H**OO is it, Sanders, that ye’re no a minister ? ” asked the Little Boy.

“ There’s mony reasons i’ this warld for a’ thing : and there’s mony reasons for that,” said Sanders. “ Ye wadna understand them if I tellt them to ye. But there’s ane o’ them I daresay ye might understand. When I was a young man there wasna ony great cry for mair ministers in Padan Aram, but there was sair need for a shoemaker, so I thocht that it wad be better to fill a need, than to overcrowd a profession. But if I’m no a minister, I’m a missionary.”

“ What ? ” said the Little Boy, “ a missionary like David Livingstone ? ”

“ Na, no like David Livingstone,” replied

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the old man. "David Livingstone was a missionary to Africa, an' I'm a missionary to India."

"When ye get a letter frae yer auntie, what dae ye dae wi' the envelope?" asked Sanders.

The Little Boy owned that as a rule he was in such a hurry to see what his aunt had sent him that he tore it.

"I dinna," rejoined Sanders. "When I get letters I gae awa til the drawer an' get oot a table knife, an' slit the envelopes open: first alang the tap and then doon the sides. Then I fold them inside oot and pet them on the tap shelf o' the dresser. Syne, I gae doon til the booksellers, an' I say til Mr. Nash, 'Will ye be sae guid, Mr. Nash, as to let me hae ane o' yer hapenny Gospels.'

"'Thae Gospels published by the Bible Society?' says Mr. Nash. 'The very thing,' says I. An' I bring it hame.

"Then I get doon ane o' ma envelopes, an' wrap up the hapenny Gospel in it, wi' the clean

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side oot. I tie it wi' a bit o' waxed thread an' pet a hapenny stamp on it. Noo, there ye have it. A hapenny-worth o' God's Word inside, an' a hapenny-worth o' postage on the ootside, the hale caboose for twa bawbees.

“But I'm no done wi' it yet. I get doon ma atlas. Ye'll ken what like an atlas is ?”

The Little Boy nodded.

“Weel, I turn it ower till I come to the map o' India. Ye'll ken the map o' India when ye see it? A leg o' mutton, wi' the island o' Ceylon for the knuckle-bane. Then I look on the map for a toon. I like the poor toons best. Man, there's a rabble o' poor toons in India : Serampur, Berhampur, and Madaripur. Or else I try a bad toon. Hoots ay, there's mair bad toons in India than I like to think aboot : Allahabad, Moorshedabad, and Hyderabad.

“Weel, I fix on ane o' thae toons, an' I write on ma packet the address like this, 'To the Postmaster, Allahabad, India.' Then I tak it doon til the post. Na, na, laddie, I dinna pet it intil the box. I'm ower cute for that. The Postmistress

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wad be a' agleg to ken what was intil't, an' micht brak the thread, keekin' in. So I just tak it inside and pet it on the coonter. An' I say important-like, 'Marget, ye'll be sae kind as to send this wee packet to India.'

"Losh keep's a'!" cries Marget, when she sees the address, 'I didna ken ye were acquent wi' the Postmaster at Allahabad.' 'I'm no acquent wi' the Postmaster at Allahabad,' I say prood-like, 'but I am acquent wi' ma duty to send God's Word to them wha hasna got it.'

"When I can spare anither twa bawbees, I gae doon for anither hapenny Gospel. I address this ane, 'To the Chief Indian Magistrate, Allahabad, India.'

"Mercy on us!" says Marget, 'but supposin' he canna read the English.' 'Weel,' says I, 'if he canna read the English, he can just tak the little book til an Indian magistrate wha can, an' then there'll be twa readers instead o' ane.'

"But I'm not done wi' Marget yet. The next ane I send til 'The Chief Constable, Allahabad, India.'

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“‘Are ye no feard,’ says Marget, ‘that the Chief Constable o’ Allahabad ’ll be angry, an’ come after ye?’ ‘Na, na,’ I says, ‘I’m no afeared. Ye see I’m no on his beat. But if I should see him come up the road, I’d slip oot intil the gairden, an’ tell the wife to say that I’m no seein’ visitors the day.’

“And I send ane to the Station Master, and ane to the Head Master o’ the English School, an’ to a’ the big fowk in Allahabad. And when I’m done wi’ Allahabad I dae like the ither missionaries, I pack up my tent and gae on til the next toon.

“‘Marget has been tryin’ to persecute me oot o’ India lately, but I’m no gaen to be persecuted oot. She said the last time that I took doon ane o’ ma Gospels wi’ a hapenny stamp on it, ‘Dae ye no think shame o’ yersel’, Sanders, to bring a’ thae packets for India an’ only pet on a hapenny stamp? Noo an’ then, it micht na matter, but ye’re aye daein’ it. If ye sent them til Dundee noo, or Brechin, there wad be some reason in it, but a’ the way to India for a

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bawbee ! It's no fair. Hoo wad ye like to hae to tak it a' the way to India for a hapenny yersel' ? ' I tellt her I'd like it fine. ' I'm thinkin' o' writin' to London aboot it, ' says she. ' Ye maun just write to London aboot it, gin ye think weel, Marget, ' I said, ' but I'm no gaen to stop. ' ' Ye're a hard man, Sanders, ' says Marget. ' Ay, maybe I am, ' says I, ' but if a man is gaen to be a missionary to India he maunna be squeamish. ' "

"Dae ye think that I could be a missionary to India ? " asked the Little Boy.

"I'm no sayin' that ye couldna, " replied Sanders. " Can ye copy print ? Yes ! What ? the print on the map ?

"Weel, if ye can dae that, I'm no sae sure but what ye micht. I dinna like to pairt wi' India, I maun acknowledge, but if ye can copy print I micht share it wi' ye. Suppose I tak the inside an' you tak the ootside. I gae doon the banks o' the Ganges on a camel, an' you can gae roond the coast in a ship. That micht dae. Ye see, it's easier to copy the names o' the toons

Sanders becomes a Missionary

on the coast, because they're printed on the sea.
I'll tak the toons i' the middle, an' you can tak
the toons roond the edge, an' the people o'
Carnoustie maun just squeeze in whar they
can."

XIX

SHOULD MEN SING HYMNS?

THERE is no doubt that the subject of singing hymns had begun to agitate even the minds of the folk of Padan Aram. The controversy had raged round them for a long time : first in the big towns, and then in the little towns ; but for years Padan Aram had held that the matter did not admit of discussion. Everybody had known for generations that it was not right to sing anything but Psalms, and as a wide liberty, perhaps paraphrases, in the House of God. If hymns must be sung, let them be sung outside the kirk. If hymns came in how could you keep out clapping, and clapping sometimes led to whistling, and whistling was a doubtful occupation anywhere. And so hymns, though

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not so bad in themselves, were apt to keep in-different company.

The Elder was one of those, however, who were beginning to feel the ground uncertain underfoot: and uncertainty was distasteful to the Elder. He would have liked to discuss the matter with the Minister, but did not care just at that moment, to ask him to commit himself on so important a subject, and one involving possible fearful consequences. So as a preliminary move he bethought him of the Precentor. Isaac Lunan was a staid believer, not given to be carried away by every wind of sentiment in religion; and the Elder could always be frank with him. So when he reached the Precentor's cottage he did not dally, but put the question bluntly to him. He was careful in the first approach to exclude the Kirk from the discussion. The question, as he stated it, was, "Should men sing Hymns?"

"Noo, as for Hymns," said the Precentor, "I'm no muckle in favour o' Hymns. I like the Psalms in metre, and I dinna object to a

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Paraphrase noo an' then, but Hymns are no sae kirk-like.

“ But as for singin’, weel, I think every man wad be the better for singin’, and for singin’ ilka day. Ye see, there’s sich a lot o’ wind in the chest o’ men fowk that maun come oot. There’s my uncle, when he’s windy he boasts, and Ben Ogilvy, the stableman, when he’s that way he swears. If a man doesna want to play on a trumpet or tak a brogue and bore a hole to let the wind aff his chest, then he’d better sing.”

But this was begging the question. The Elder quite agreed with his friend, but it was the subject of Hymns that was on his mind, so he brought the Precentor back wi’ the curt remark :

“ I’m hearin’ that the Minister sometimes has a Hymn at family worship wi’ the children.”

“ Ay,” said the Precentor, “ there’s mony a thing loosed for the sake o’ the bairns.”

“ Indeed,” continued the Elder, “ when I was up gien’ the Minister a call ae nicht last winter, I had to bide at the door till family

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worship was ower, and I heard them singing a Hymn. And what's mair I ken whar that Hymn cam frae. It cam frae Edinburgh. It was an Edinburgh Hymn."

" Maybe it was ane o' Bonar's new Hymns. Ye ken the Minister is weel acquaint wi' Mr. Bonar. Dae ye mind the words ? "

The Elder remembered two verses, for he had read the Hymn in the Poet's Corner of the *People's Journal*, and indeed had liked it so much as poetry, apart from singing, that he learned it. So he recited the first verse to the Precentor.

" Short metre," said the Precentor. " We'll try it to 'Selma.' Though, man, Selma's ower good for a Hymn."

He struck the tuning fork on his knee, stood it on its head on the table with its two legs quivering in the air, caught the upper "C," dropped down the scale two and three notes at a time, then jumped up with a bound from the bottom of the scale to the note that he wanted. He hummed the note to himself and the Elder, and the two men sang the first verse :—

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“A few more years shall roll,
A few more seasons come,
And we shall be with those that rest
Asleep within the tomb.”

“Gie’s anither verse,” said the Precentor, warming to his loved work of singing.

“Then, O my Lord, prepare
My soul for that great day ;
Oh, wash me in Thy precious blood,
And take my sins away.”

The Precentor smacked his lips and put his tuning fork in his pocket, and as he did so said—

“Dootless a man wrote that Hymn, but God Almighty inspired it ; and tak notice, that it’s mair Christian than mony o’ the words we sing i’ the Kirk the noo.”

The Elder was startled at this bout of heterodoxy, but on the spur of the moment could not deny its truth.

“Let’s see,” said the Precentor, “it’s Tuesday, the day, is it no ? Tuesday’s the day when the Little Lass and me hae to sing wer Psalm by wersels.”

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“What!” jerked the Elder, “does Mrs. Lunan no join in the worship on a Tuesday?”

“Na,” replied the Precentor, “no on a Tuesday. She does ilka ither day, but no on a Tuesday. Ye see, Tuesday’s bakin’ day, and Mrs. Lunan couldna leave the bakin’ for onything. Man, if the queen hersel’ was to drive up til this door, in her gold coach on a Tuesday, and cry oot, ‘Mrs. Lunan, come doon to the Toon’s Hall an’ be made a duchess,’ Mrs. Lunan wadna gae. She’d say, ‘I’m muckle beholden til yer Majesty, but I canna come till I’ve done ma bakin’.’

“It’s no that she doesna join in sometimes, but she winna stop the bakin’. She’s aye carefu’ though wi’ the oven door. She never slams it except at the end o’ the lines when we’re takin’ breath, or atween the verses.

“But there was aince that the Little Lass wadna join in.”

The Elder started. He loved the Little Lass.

“Ay, it’s true,” said the Precentor, “and I

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can tell ye a' aboot it. It was the day o' the Sabbath School treat. The bairns were awa doon in Farmer Fotheringay's field wi' their best claes on, and it cam on to rain. That didna sae much matter, but it wadna stop rainin'; and so a' the bairns had to come hame. The treat was spoiled, and the Little Lass was very angry. She was angry wi' God, because, she said, 'It wasna Farmer Fotheringay that made it rain. Farmer Fotheringay was a good man, and said that he would stop it rainin' if he could, for the sake o' the weans, but it was God Wha made it rain and Wha stopped it rainin' when He liked.' So the Little Lass was angry wi' God and wadna sing. I mean she wadna sing at worship, when me and the wife war singin'.

"She meant to punish God. And then when she had made Him think that she wasna goin' to sing, she would sing afterwards, just to show that it was all right, if He wadna do it again. She had made up her mind to sing after she had gotten up til her bed. But, man, a great calamity happened. When she got up to her bed and

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wanted to sing she had clean forgotten the tune. It took her mither half an oor to comfort her, and she was greetin' when she fell asleep."

The Elder left in a hurry. He darted out into the dark, and the latch rattled as he pulled the door after him violently. An old and bitter memory was upon him. He fled down the road till he reached his house door, then he calmed a little and crept back to the Precentor's cottage. He did not go in, but he pushed the door open, and seeing Lunan sitting by himself reading his Tune Book by the light of the fire, he whispered, "Lunan, man, it's no a wise thing to punish God."

MISUNDERSTOOD

WHEN the Little Boy arrived at Sanders' cottage, there was no one in. He slipped through the house and looked down the garden. There were the pansies and the sweet-williams, and at the bottom of the garden, leaning on the low stone wall, was Sanders himself. He was looking westward, to where Ben Lomond stood, with its feet in the deep lake.

"What are ye daen', Sanders?" asked the Little Boy.

"I'm listenin'," said Sanders.

The Little Boy listened too. A mavis was singing in a bush, and he could hear the panting of the train, as it made its way at a distance into Farkeld.

Misunderstood

“The Sun’s gye red,” said the Little Boy, by way of opening the conversation.

“It has made its face red wi’ frettin’,” replied the old man.

“Frettin’?” cried the Little Boy; “what has the Sun gotten to fret aboot?”

“He says that he is aye misunderstood,” murmured Sanders.

The Little Boy opened his eyes.

“Naebody misunderstands the Sun. Everybody loves him.” Of this the Little Boy was sure.

“The Sun says that he has just heard the wifie next door cry up to the children i’ the garret, to get intil their beds, ‘for the Sun is settin’,’” said Sanders. “And the Sun says that it is clean reediculous: he is no settin’, and has never set in a’ his life. He might whiles be set if somebody wad lend him a chair. But naebody has gotten a chair big enough.

“It’s not only the people livin’ noo, that misunderstand him. A’ the fowk wha are dead,

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died misunderstandin' him. The graveyairds are full o' fowk wha misunderstood him. Deed ! they used to say that when he got til the far end o' the airth i' the west, he fell intil the sea, and had his licht pet oot : an' that his licht was pet oot ilka nicht. If his licht was pet oot ilka nicht, then what he wants them kindly to tell him is, wha lit him agen. No wonder the puir soul is vexed.

“ There were some saft fowk wha used to say that when he got til the west end o' the airth he used to creep back til the east end under the floor. ‘ Oh dear ! Under the floor ! Oh dear ! ’

“ Besides, a' the little people think that he is little, like them. He says that he isna little. I dinna ken whether he's boastin' or no, but he's tryin' to mak believe that it wad tak a million o' oor airths to mak ane o' him.

“ ‘ Noo, there 's the Little Boy and his Littler Sister,’ the Sun is sayin', ‘ they think I hide behind Ben Lomond a' nicht. I dinna hide ahent Ben Lomond a' nicht. I'm ninety-three

Misunderstood

millions o' miles awa frae Ben Lomond, when Ben Lomond is sleepin'.

“‘ Losh keep’s a’ ! if the Little Boy had been livin’ when the great Spanish Armada cam sailin’ to his land, and if the Little Boy had taken his Littler Sister, an’ fled frae the airth to me in a railway carriage, they wad only just be gettin’ oot at the first station i’ the Sun, this very meenute.

“‘ And then there’s thae Astronomers wha keep lookin’ at me through their spy-glasses. They winna let me be private. But that’s no the worst o’t ; for a’ they tell fowk aboot me is, that I’ve gotten spots on ma face. So wad they hae spots on their face, if they couldna wash. An’ noo the henmaist thing they hae been tellin’ people aboot, is ma wrinkles. They ca’ them lines. They’re no wrinkles, an’ they’re no lines. Never mind what they are. I’m ower angry to say. Baillie ! hoo angry I am ! an’ hoo hot I’ve made ma face !

“‘ Yes, I hae the richt to be angry. They are aye sayin’ cruel things agen me. They say

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noo, that I eat the little Comets, and live on them, puir wee things. Mercy ! I'm too frichtened o' their tails to gae near them.

“‘I’ve just come ower the land o’ India, and there I took notice o’ a Hindoo bathing i’ the river ; and when he was finished he bowed to me. An’ I heard some o’ the Parsees ca’ me . . . I dinna like to say what they ca’d me : it’s sae wicked ; they ca’d me “God.” Oh ! Oh ! ma heart’s burnin’. Will naebody fan me ?

“‘A’ the world blames me for shadows. Hoo can I help the shadows ? They aye keep awa frae me. They jook on the far side o’ little boys. An’ hoo can I kill the shadows without hittin’ the little boys ? Na, I’d rather be misunderstood, than dae ony sich thing.’”

And the Sun covered his face with a cloud-handkerchief.

The Little Boy thought that perhaps the Sun meant him, and he trembled, and asked the Sun, “please never to mind. He would put up with his shadow. His shadow didna hurt him a wee bittie ; it was a nice saft gentle shadow.”

Misunderstood

Then the quiet voice of the Earth was heard speaking. Although, to say truth, the voice of the Earth sounded very like the old shivering voice of Sanders.

“Never mind, dear sweet Sun,” she said, as she turned her other side to him to be warmed, “never mind. People misunderstand me too. For six thousand years they said that I was flat, but I let them walk on me a’ the same. Never mind ! Never mind ! Let us be good, though misunderstood ; though misunderstood, let us be good.”

THE REV. JAMIE FRAZER INSISTS ON THE CHITTLINS

ONE of the characteristics of the Rev. Jamie Frazer (he was not a real Reverend) was a passion for auctions. It did not matter to Mr. Frazer whether the auction was of farm stock or a weaver's belongings, or furniture. Jamie was always on the look out. The Minister was wont to declare that Frazer had improved weaving, farming, and housing, by this passion of his. And there was something to be said for the Minister's contention. It was remarkable how one farmer after another found, that by selling a heap of useless oddments, he had been able to get an up-to-date machine: and how some weaver, forced by the very weariness that had overcome

Jamie insists on the Chittlins

his loom, to sell it for what it would fetch, found that it fetched a new one.

As for housing, Jamie's plan was simplicity itself. It was not often that a cottage came into the market, but whenever it did, Jamie was busy. He was not particular about the cottage. What he was always anxious about was, who was the tenant. If the tenant pleased him, Jamie was a buyer. He bought, put the cottage in repair, and reduced the rent. Yet strange to say, Jamie never owned many houses, nor any houses for long. When a tenant had paid the rent of a cottage for a while, that tenant invariably discovered that he had paid Jamie the price of it, and that it was his: and Jamie, for the life of him, could not see through the sophistry. As for furniture, his landlady's house was full of furniture, which she was keeping for him.

“The Rev. Jamie Frazer's landlady remarked to me the day,” said the Elder, “that if Jamie buys ony mair furniture, he'll hae to keep it himsel'.”

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“That he winna,” replied the Minister. “Here’s a readin’ desk that he had sent up to the Manse because he hadna ony room for it, but wad want it when he got a bigger house. I’ve been writin’ ma sermons on it noo for the last fifteen year. He’s got bits o’ furniture in half the hooses in Padan Aram.”

“He’s aye daein’ strange things,” meditated the Elder. “I mind aince he bocht a creeper. Naebody could tell what Jamie wanted wi’ a creeper. He couldna tell himsel’. But what he did was to tak it til the carter who bides i’ the little hoose opposite, and ask him if he wad dae him the favour to plant it on the sunny front o’ his hoose, to gae it a start; and he’d hae a cuttin’ frae it the next year.

“I’m no a fiddler masel’,” continued the Elder, “but I was rale sorry for that auld fiddlin’ weaver body, wha lives i’ the Wynd, when his wife stepped on his. It was on a chair at the time, an’ the wife was standin’ on the table, gettin’ a pot o’ jeelie aff the tap shelf. Comin doon, she cam doon heavy-like, on the puir

Jamie insists on the Chittlins

thing. Weel, Jamie suddenly discovered that he wanted a new fiddle. He bocht ane, an' took it til the weaver to try for him, 'because the weaver kent a bittie aboot fiddles.' That weaver's got it noo. Jamie never fetched it. 'Na, na,' he said, 'I dinna want it. I canna bear to pairt wi' ma auld ane.'

"Dae ye mind yon time," went on the Elder, "when he cam back frae Edinburgh wi' an armfu' o' medical books, new medical books, an' gied them til the lad wha was mad to be a doctor? Jamie wanted the lad to read up for him aboot elephantiasis. He was awfie concerned aboot elephantiasis. He didna ken whether he had got it, or whether he had had it, or whether he was gaen to hae it: and he wanted the aspirin' lad to read up an' tell him.

"An' when Mrs. Curly reformed, that was Jamie's opportunity. It was guid to hae a new Mrs. Curly, but the hame didna come back o' itsel', simply because the mistress had turned teetotal. Na, na! But it did begin to come back. Jamie didna help in that. No, not he.

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He said, 'It wad be a lesson til Mrs. Curly ; an' she could just wait for things till she had saved the money for them, an' then perhaps she wadna sell them quite sae cheap ?' But he had bocht a pig that he wanted Mistress Curly to keep for him. He hadna ony place for a gruntin' snortin' pig in his rooms. If Mistress Curly wad kindly keep it for him, he wad pay for its board and lodgin'. An' sure enough, Jamie was up there every Friday evenin' to see that the pig was weel cared for, an' to pay for its keep. When Curly killed that pig, Jamie tellt him that he had just better salt it for the winter, an' let him hae the chittlins. He insisted on ha'en the chittlins."

The Minister laughed his great open-hearted laugh.

"It was sae like the Rev. Jamie to insist on ha'en the chittlins o' his ain pig."

There was a long pause. A long pause was expected : and these two friends never failed to pay this compliment to each other's narrations.

Jamie insists on the Chittlins

When the Minister broke the silence at last, he said—

“I’m no sae sure that the Rev. Jamie Frazer’s kindnesses war a’ pure unselfishness. There were no mony things that he did that didna bring him profit.”

The Elder raised his shaggy eyebrows. The Minister’s remark sounded malicious. The Minister answered the Elder’s eyebrows.

“Noo, tak the case o’ the Carter’s creeper. Wha had the pleasure o’ that creeper? Did the Carter or Jamie? Think carefu’ noo. Was it no the front o’ the hoose it was on?”

The Elder agreed.

“An’ whatna door o’ his bit hoose was it that the Carter used? Was it no his back door? If the Carter wanted to see that creeper, did he no hae to come oot o’ the back door o’ his hoose, an’ gae intil the road an’ look up at it like ony stranger?”

The Elder nodded.

“But what aboot Jamie? Every time he keekit oot o’ his windy, he saw that creeper.

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He didna hae to gae oot o' his hoose, or even turn roond. It was aye there whar he could see it withoot lookin'. Ay, Jamie's nae gowk."

The Elder began to be interested.

"Man alive!" went on the Minister, "it doesna matter whatna cottage Jamie gaes intil, he's gotten a comfortable chair to sit doon in. 'Havers!' Jamie'll say, when the guid wife tells him to sit doon in the saftest chair i' the hoose, 'Na, na, I'll just sit here on ane o' thae braw windsor anes.' 'Mercy on the man!' the guid wife 'll cry, 'sit doon in 't. Is it no yer ain?'

"Deed, yon fiddlin' weaver i' the Wynd, is naething mair nor less than Jamie's private orchestra. Jamie doesna pay him ony wages, but that fiddler 'll gae an' play til Jamie ony day. The fiddler has to buy a' his ain strings himsel', an' I ken for a sober fact, that he has had to spend mair than a shillin' on roset alone, i' the last twenty year."

The Elder enjoyed the account of Jamie's cuteness.

Jamie insists on the Chittlins

“Ye winna deny that Jamie wanted, wi’ a’ his heart, to gae up noo an’ then, an’ say a cheery word til the woman he had saved frae hersel’. An’ ye winna deny that he had the excuse for gaen aye handy, when he had the pig up there in her gairden, that he maun aye be gaen to see ?

“Ye canna hae forgotten hoo that medical laddie cam back to Padan Aram, an’ nursed the Rev. Jamie through his last lang illness ? Though Jamie was a’ wrang aboot the elephantiasis.

“Ye see that row o’ books up there ? That row belongs to Frazer, but it’s my guid wife wha has to keep them dusted.

“An’, man, think o’ the happy evenin’s Jamie an’ me hae spent in this very room, when Jamie has come up to borrow ane o’ his ain books, an’ then gaen awa without it, because, as he said, he ‘didna haud wi’ borrowin’.’ ”

“But ye’re no tryin’ to say, are ye,” asked the Elder incredulously, “yer no tryin’ to say that daen guid is guid policy ? ”

“What for no ? ” queried the Minister,

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surprised in his turn. "Ye're surely no ane o' thae foolish fowk wha think that God only tells us to dae the things that we're gaen to lose by? Is it no guid policy to dae guid til yer ain wife?"

The Elder hurried to assent.

"Is it no guid policy to dae guid til yer ain bairns, til yer brithers an' sisters, an' yer faither an' mither? Then, too, is it no guid policy to dae guid til yer neebor, an' til yer enemy if ye hae ane? Man, God kens weel that it's the finest, an' the only way wi' an enemy. Daen guid is ane o' the keenest swords for killin' evil that God has pet intil the hands o' errin' men. And what's mair, daen guid is guid capital. But freend, sich like things are hid frae the wise and prudent. A man maun become a wee bairnie to ken aboot them."

"The Lord help us to do good to all men," said the Elder, as he brushed his hat wi' his coat sleeve, preparatory to getting up.

"Especially to them that are of the household of faith," responded the Minister.

XXII

WHEN JOY AND SORROW FIRST MET

KIRSTY'S lesson was taken from the Book of Genesis. There is no denying that she was fond of that book. There seemed to be a natural relationship between the primitive times of the world's history and the simple ways of the folk among whom she had been brought up. It was a wonderful discovery that she made when she was yet a wee lass, that the name of her town was in the Book of Genesis; and it was months before she could find out whether her Padan Aram was the Padan Aram of Abraham. If Kirsty's exaltation came from the Book of Psalms, and her pious vision from the Parables of Jesus, some of her common-sense views of life were gathered

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in the deserts of Genesis and around its tent doors.

“Comfort ye your hearts,” was her motto this Sabbath afternoon ; and what helped her to find that text was a bit of crape on the simple hat of a girl, sitting with chastened spirit among the other lasses.

Kirsty had her own philosophy of comfort. When sorrow came to any house in which Kirsty was concerned, the first thing that she did was to heat the oven. Then she would bake some bannocks and fill a little wooden bowl, which she kept for the purpose, with fresh butter. Furnished with these, she would start out for the house of sorrow.

“Food and friendship are the twa great medicines for wounds,” she used to say. “Just tak a bite and ye’ll feel better,” she urged ; and many there were who confessed themselves comforted with a morsel of Kirsty’s bread, and a rest under the tree of Kirsty’s compassion. They were almost ashamed to own it, and never would have thought that bannocks were any

When Joy and Sorrow first met

good for sore hearts. Nevertheless, there was a charm in Kirsty's prescription.

"I foond the recipe in the Book o' Genesis," she said. "It was the recipe that Abraham used to comfort the Lord and His twa freends when they cam to his tent door, grieved and determined at the wickedness and fate of Sodom."

The germ of the Grace which Kirsty sometimes said before meat was found in this incident. "For food and friendship, Lord, we thank Thee, in the Saviour's name. Amen."

In the course of that afternoon's lesson Kirsty was gradually ascending from the common sense of Genesis, through the singing of the Book of Psalms, into the delightful picture-teaching of her Saviour. And now she was being spirited forward by the poetry of her own imagination.

"There was a time afore Jesus cam to the airth," she was saying, "when Joy and Sorrow refused to meet. In ony place, if Sorrow cam creepin' silently in at the door, Joy was the first

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to see her, and slip oot through the window. And if Sorrow was in ony hoose, and heard the shout o' Joy on the hills, she'd pull her dark skirts roond her and slip awa west. West, because that was the side where the night was hiding.

“But when Jesus cam to the airth baith Joy and Sorrow wanted to see Him. And what was mair, they wanted His blessin’; and each wanted His blessin’ first. Baith o’ them were sure that they had a ministry to men and women, and baith were anxious to be employed by Jesus in His great religion. Joy hoped that he would be preferred simply because he was Joy, and Sorrow for reasons o’ her ain.

“So it happened that when Jesus began to leave His working bench in Capernaum, and to walk doon to the sea beach to teach the people, that ae day when the crood had gone, and Jesus was left alone, night was falling over the sea, and baith Joy and Sorrow creepit towards Him. There was a boat lying on the shingle. In the shadow o’ that boat Jesus was sayin’ His evening

When Joy and Sorrow first met

prayers. As Jesus rose up frae His knees, they slipped roond, when, sure enough, there were Joy and Sorrow before Him—arrived at the selfsame moment.

“For the first time Joy and Sorrow faced each ither. They fled. Joy towards the hills, while Sorrow slipped doon to the sea.

“But the Saviour had caught sight o’ them, and He ca’d them to Him.

“‘Come, brither Joy, thou son o’ heaven, come. Come close, I hae need o’ thee. And, sister Sorrow, tearful daughter o’ this sweet Earth, come. Come close, for I hae need o’ thee.’

“And when they came, they, bein’ close to Jesus, were close to ane anither. Then it was that Joy looked into the eyes o’ Sorrow and received the gift o’ Gravity, and Sorrow, beholdin’ the face o’ Joy, received the gift to smile.

“Ever since that time ye canna tell whar in a Christian heart the ane ends and the ither begins. There’s times when they seem to be there thegither.

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“It was so i’ the early Church. Bless me, lassies ! it says in the histories that whiles, when the Christians in the big toon o’ Rome were driven intil the circus to be eaten by the lions, that they went in weepin’ and singin’, and naebody noo can tell whether it was Joy wha went wi’ them or Sorrow. And Joy and Sorrow winna tell.

“Even the Apostles didna seem to ken which o’ them was wi’ them. Ane o’ them cries out, ‘Sorrowfu’, Sorrowfu’, Sorrowfu’, yet aye rejoicin’.’ Ithers o’ them went oot o’ the Court Hoose rejoicin’ that they were sufferin’ for the sake o’ the Name.

“Lassies, I’m no afearn for Joy. He’s a ruddy lad, and he’ll never die. But whiles when I look at gentle Sorrow I’m sorry for her. I’m thinkin’ often that she’ll no ootlive her auld Mither Earth. She doesna seem hersel’ to hae ony bricht hope o’ ha’en a place in heaven. Sweet, gentle Sorrow, how we feared her when we saw her first ! But we’re no that muckle feard o’ her noo, she’s no that hard. We

When Joy and Sorrow first met

couldna dae withoot her. Na, na ; no while
we hae oor sin. I'm thinkin' that Sorrow 'll just
wither when there's nae mair sin to wash awa,
and nae mair wounds to heal."

XXIII

THE MINISTER KISSES THE BOOK

THE position of an elder in the church served by the Rev. Jacob Stewart was one of the few honours which Padan Aram had to offer to its men folk. An eldership was a lifelong appointment. Although only members of the Church had the power of the vote, the whole town took an interest in the matter. The merits of the candidates were discussed at that corner of the Square frequented by the older men, and whiffs of the discussion sometimes blew over to the corner where lads and lassies stood waiting for each other to say something.

A vacancy had been created by the withdrawal on account of age of a much-esteemed weaver.

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Ingles was of opinion that the town did not approach the election of elders from the right side. It was the custom of the town in general to endeavour to make out the candidate whom they did not favour to be a worse man than the candidate whom they did favour. This they did by exposing the weaknesses and faults of the man whom they did not want. Where there were two or three candidates for one vacancy, the result was, that no matter who was fortunate in the election, he came to his office with charges pinned to his name, which, while they might be altogether untrue, were most inconvenient when associated with the holy office of elder.

Ingles greatly desired that all who took an interest in elections to elderships would rather weigh the qualifications of the several candidates, and so prove, not who of them was the most frail, but who was the most suitable for the sacred office. In that case not only the fortunate candidate, but even those good men who failed would have to their credit the good their neighbours had discovered in them.

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When Ingles had made these opinions known to the Minister, he began to give him an account of an election in which he had been interested many years before in another parish.

“There war twa candidates,” began Ingles, “in the election aboot which I’m tellin’ ye. Ane was ca’d Land and the ither Macdougall. Noo, the discussion began, as I was sayin’, no on the qualifications o’ the candidates, but on their failin’s: no on the reasons why they should be elders, but on the reasons why they shouldna.

“As for Land the fowk said that he’d never dae for an elder. He hadna a guid Sacrament face. He was ower rosy and smilin’. What was wanted in an elder was a man wi’ a solemn face so as no to scandalise the quarterly Communion. Besides, he wasna a guid man to stand at the plate in the kirk lobby. He was ower guid natured. Somebody had heard that when he took his turn at the plate in the town he cam’ frae, there were aye mair bad hapennies pet in, than when ither elders were on duty.

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“As for Macdougall, thae wha didna want him made oot that he had been an elder in a church afore that ; that he wasna popular ; that when he was at ae door o’ the kirk the fowk went to the ither door ; and that aince he stood for twenty minutes in the draught, and only got five bawbees, and then, lest the Session should discover it, pet in a handfu’ o’ pennies himsel’ afore he took the plate to the vestry.

“And what was quite as serious was this. Aince a visitor frae Edinburgh cam til the kirk and pet in a pound note. Then a gust o’ wind cam and blew it oot o’ the plate on til the pavement ; and Macdougall had to chase it halfway doon the street, rinnin’ on the Sabbath, as if it was an ordinary day.

“Sae mony things were said against him that he kept his wife and bairns in the hoose till the election was ower, lest they should hear what a bad man he had been and disown him.

“It was Macdougall, however, wha was elected wi’ a’ his fauts ; and that, because Land

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withdrew, when he learned, frae his neebours and fellow-townsman, what a suspicious character he was."

"I ken them baith," rejoined the Minister, "baith Land and Macdougall, and nae kirk need ask for better men to minister its affairs. But man, Ingles, it's no only elders wha hae to bear fowk speakin' ill o' them. Ministers hae to pet up wi' it as weel. We are public characters, ye ken ; and public characters maun aye be prepared to be misrepresented."

The Minister drew a book from the drawer of his writing table. It was a volume neatly bound in leather and pleasant to handle. When the Minister opened it, Ingles noticed that it was a book for writing in ; and also that there were newspaper-cuttings pasted on some of the pages. The fact was that the book was one compiled by the Minister himself. It contained articles from local papers which had been written against him, and notices in his own handwriting of gossip that had been put into circulation against him, when he had done something which displeased

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some one who could get his stuff printed, or could persuade fools to listen to him.

The Minister turned over the pages reverently, selected a page, and began to read. He was reading a cutting :—

“‘ Among the candidates appearing for the vacancy in the kirk at Durclachan, the Rev. Jacob Stewart may regard himself as having no chance of success, inasmuch as it has now come to common knowledge that he reads his sermons. We must confess that though we were present on the occasion of the reverend gentleman’s visit, it was not apparent to us that he read his discourses. This may be accounted for by the fact that being a little late in arriving we were seated towards the back of the church. But one of the elders informs us of the following fact. The Minister was by some inadvertence left in the vestry alone for a few moments before the service. On one of the elders rejoining the Minister in the vestry, the pulpit Bible which lay ready on the vestry table was heard to close suddenly. This could mean nothing else than

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that the reverend gentleman had put his written discourse into it, and had only just escaped being caught in the act.'"

The Minister turned to a second cutting :—

"“Since referring to the candidature of the Probationer, the Rev. Jacob Stewart, we have received further evidence that the reverend gentleman does read his sermons, and that his method of doing so is as elusive as reprehensible. It appears that the reverend gentleman is in the habit of writing out his sermons on separate sheets of paper, and that, in order to avoid detection in the act of reading, he unobtrusively slips each sheet, as it is done with, on to the floor of the pulpit. So clever is Mr. Stewart in this movement, that he is rarely detected. It is from a distant parish that we learn that on the occasion of Mr. Stewart's visit to that neighbourhood, the Beadle saw the reverend gentleman, at the close of the service, leave the vestry, after he had divested himself of his gown, and go back into the pulpit, when the church was empty, and gather up the sheets.'”

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A third cutting ran as follows :—

“ ‘ We are of opinion that the Rev. Jacob Stewart may now be dismissed from the minds of our fellow-towners as at all likely to become one of themselves. Not only is it established that the reverend gentleman reads his discourses, but information has come to our knowledge which shows that, clever as he undoubtedly is in concealing the practice, he is subject to the accidents incidental to such a frailty. It is now some time since the event happened which we proceed to record, but our readers will readily admit that that fact does not do away with its seriousness. It appears that on the occasion of which we write the reverend gentleman was reading his discourse as usual. He was discoursing of that warning to all evil doers, King Ahab ; and he had the misfortune in slipping off a sheet which he had just read, to slip off two sheets instead of one, and owing to Mr. Stewart’s subtle trick of letting them fall to the floor, both sheets were at once beyond his reach. The result was that he read, “ And Ahab took to

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wife Jezebel the daughter of the king of the Zidonians, a lady—a lady—a lady—the height whereof was a hundred and fifty feet and the breadth thereof seventy-five feet, covered on the inside with boards of cedar, and on the outside with beaten gold, supported on four massive legs of cedar wood, and facing towards the north ! ” ”

“ The Lord forgie the leear wha attributed that to me,” said the Minister, as he concluded his reading.

“ I wonder at ye,” said Ingles, “ keepin’ a’ thae things by ye and readin’ them to mak yersel’ angry, noo that they’re a’ sae lang past.”

“ Na, na, Ingles,” said the Minister, “ they dinna mak me angry, they’ve been a real help to me. It wasna a’ true that the paper said aboot ma readin’, but it was quite true that I did read i’ yon days. And I never wad hae gotten oot o’ the habit, sae tied was I til it and sae fearsome, if it hadna been for thae lyin’ things i’ the newspaper. And I’m grateful for ony whip that maks me struggle to the top o’ a steep brae.

“ Sometimes I tak the book and coont up the

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charges that were true and tellt o' fauts I hae been able to mend. Then I coont up the things in which there was some truth, and that have helped me to a better way ; and I laugh at the things that were havers.

“ Syne, I’m fond o’ sortin’ oot o’ that crood, the fowk that were ma freends, though they werena aye o’ my opinion ; and thae guid fowk that werena ma freends, but hae been converted to ma freendship. If there’s ae book I value more than anither, it’s this Book o’ Grumbles, and every noo and then I examine masel’ by its help.”

There were some private pages in that precious volume. Those pages the Minister did not show to Ingles.

On some of them were written the gentle criticisms of his own good wife, sacred and valued. For these he blessed God and praised her. “ Ye’re better to me nor a mirror, both for ma behaviour and for ma spirit, that ye are, ma lass,” he would say.

On other pages some of his children’s

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remarks appeared, not all wise but all throwing a strange young light into odd corners.

There were also recorded a few stray remarks of fellow-ministers, shot out in unguarded moments and in moments of annoyance. These bursts had been as fine gold to him all the days of his ministerial life.

There were criticisms also upon his own spiritual life, by his own conscience, and in one much-conned portion of the book were notes of matters he had learned incidentally, especially of those things which the sick and weary and the tried had missed from his preaching.

“Ay,” soliloquised the Minister, “I hae done mony things that were na just richt for a minister to dae, but Ingles, man, the thing that maks me shiver whiles is the discovery o’ things which should hae been done that I quite overlooked, and things that should have been said that never occurred to me. And ma best freend has aye been, no the man wha tellt me what I could easily see wrang wi’ masel’, but the man wha could point oot to me the guid things I’d be

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delighted to do, if only I thought o' them. These are the freends wha hae helped me to be a better minister, and what is maybe o' mair importance, to be a better man.

“I dinna complain,” went on the Minister, “that whiles I hae been misunderstood nor even that at times I hae been misrepresented. That’s the portion of a’ public men. And this more I hae learned, that a criticism may be made helpful even when it is na true. And I am trying by readin’ this book and takin’ warnin’ by its judgments to be the less guilty when I appear before my Maker.”

So saying the Minister closed the book, turned it over, and then solemnly kissed it.

XXIV

THE TROUBLES OF MONDAY

S ANDERS was seated at the table eating his porridge.

“I’m Monday !” said a voice.

Sanders started, looked round, could not find the way to his mouth, dropped his horn spoon into the wooden bowl which contained the cold milk, and stared about him.

“I’m Monday !” repeated the voice.

“Thank ye kindly,” said Sanders, recovering himself ; “and I’m Sanders.”

“And I’m Monday in a bad humour,” snapped the voice.

Sanders was very sorry for it.

“Perhaps,” suggested Sanders, “you’re the Monday I hae heard fowk ca’ Blue Monday.”

“That’s ane o’ ma troubles. People will call

The Troubles of Monday

me nicknames. If I could be Blue Monday, and always blue, I might get used to it. But ma trouble is that I hae to be a' sorts o' Mondays."

"I've heard," replied Sanders, "that when you are in England, sometimes ye're Whit-Monday and sometimes Bank-holiday Monday, and whiles Washing Day."

Monday wiped the steam off his face with a sigh.

"Sometimes I'm a Summer Monday perspirin'; sometimes a Spring Monday wi' dew in ma hair; sometimes I'm an Autumn Monday wi' the red leaves fallin' round ma feet; and whiles I hae to be a shivering Winter Monday."

"Ay," said Sanders, "and I hope ye wiped yer boots when ye cam in at the door. The floor 's new sanded."

"Sich a lot o' men say when they see me," went on Monday, "'I wish it was Saturday.' The servant girls say, 'I wish it was Sunday afternoon'; and the young chaps say, 'Dash it all, why aren't you a half-holiday?'"

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And Monday sobbed again.

“Dae ye wish ye were Tuesday?” enquired Sanders.

“Worse and worse!” cried Monday, “the bairns canna spell Tuesday.”

“Weel then,” said Sanders, “dae ye wish ye were dead?”

Monday shuddered. He was six thousand years old, and yet the rascal with all his troubles would not die.

“Weel,” said Sanders, “there maun be some secret joys even in your life, if ye dinna want to dee.”

“Hush!” said Monday, “let me whisper, lest the others should hear, I hae gotten the best place. I’m next to Sunday.”

“Ay, so ye are. But what’s the benefit?” asked Sanders.

“Hoots, man! can ye no see that?” enquired Monday, getting as near to laughing as Monday could, in his present mood. “Why, some o’ the joy o’ Sunday spills over intil me, snatches o’ the psalm, wee bits o’ the sermon, a child’s love for

The Troubles of Monday

teacher, and father's determination to lose a little profit and gain a little more homesweetness."

Monday made softly for the door, then changed his mind and went out of the window.

Sanders took up his spoon and opened his big mouth for a sup of his porridge. His porridge was cold now. Monday stood in the little back garden. His head just reached the window-sill, so he put his chin on it, and made a face at Sanders.

He was sorry for that in a moment, and said, "Sanders!"

Then he looked round to see if Tuesday was listening.

"I'll tell ye a secret," he said. "Honour bright?"

Sanders nodded.

"Sunday's the first day o' the week, is it no? And I'm the second, am I no? Weel, I'm tryin' a' the time to catch up Sunday. I've kept close up for sixty hundred years. There's only a meenute atween us noo. I shall soon be Sunday!"

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Sanders jeered at the ridiculous idea.

“Never ! Never !” he cried.

“Ay, but I will,” said Monday, trying to look as much like Sunday as he could. “Ay, I will. I heard a preacher say so. I heard him say it once, when I was waitin’ for Sunday to ‘gae oot and waitin’ for my turn to come in. I heard him say ‘there shall be no more night.’ Noo when there’s nae mair nicht, what is there to separate Monday frae Sunday ? They’ll be ane ! And fowk winna get to ca’ me Blue Monday ony mair.”

XXV

A PREVENTIVE OF NIGHTMARE

“ **I**T’S a pity we havena gotten an Art Gallery nearer nor Dundee,” said the Elder.

It was a pity. The young people of the town soon exhausted the public exhibitions of Padan Aram. There were pictorial advertisements of soap and blue on the wall near the bridge; the pictures on the covers of weekly magazines in Mr. Nash’s window; a couple of hats at the milliner’s; and the motto on the shortbread in Kirsty’s window.

“ Dae ye ken whar ye’ll find the finest picture in Padan Aram ?” asked the Minister.

The Elder’s mind ran round the rooms of the Manse; for he felt that it must be one of them. The only thing was that he could not quite make up his mind between, “ The Battle

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of Drumclog" and the "Portrait of John Knox."

Mr. Stewart relieved the Elder by giving the answer to his own question without delay.

"The finest picture in Padan Aram," said he, "is the silhouette of the Rev. Jamie Frazer."

"And whar micht that be?" enquired the Elder.

"On his window blind," replied Mr. Stewart, "when his candle is lichted."

The Elder recognised it at once. It was famous in Padan Aram. When the Rev. Jamie took out his fiddle in the evenings, he always had his candle on the table beside him, and his shadow on the blind.

It was a favourite occupation with unemployed lads on winter nights, to go down to Jamie's and watch his figure on the blind. It was their circus; and Jamie's fiddle was the orchestral accompaniment. Jamie had no idea of the entertainment he gave or the good he did, on those long winter evenings. He knew nothing of the interest his doings had for everybody; of

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the thoughts he gave rise to in quiet meditative minds ; of the new courses of action which he suggested to doubters ; of the ambitions which he conjured up in the hearts of children ; or of the strange quiet trust which he created in aged bodies.

The knowledge which the youth of Padan Aram acquired of Psalmody was much augmented by Jamie's contributions. Their intimate acquaintance with the traditional music of Scotland was almost entirely due to him and his playing inside his quiet room. So also were they indebted to him for their familiarity with Scotland's wonderful collection of ballads. One ballad after another was wormed out of its hiding-place in little cottages, and some lad with a sweet young voice would sing them to an attentive group on a piece of open ground close by Jamie's house, to Jamie's unconscious accompaniment.

His unintentional contribution to the juvenile sport of Padan Aram was, moreover, very considerable. Bets in marbles would be made as to the piece Jamie would be playing when the lads

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reached his window ; or as to whether he would be playing at all. Races were organised nightly to the stalls for Jamie's concert ; races in which bits of rock from the quarry had to be carried, at the end of stout string culminating in leather suckers, from any part of the town where the lads happened to be. And should Jamie be tuning up when the party arrived, great debates had to be conducted on the topic as to whether "he had gotten enough roset on his bow."

On the same open space close to Jamie's house, to which reference has been made, battles between jacketless laddies took place to decide what was the particular piece that Jamie was playing ; whether, for instance, it was, "Scots wha hae," or, "I'm wearin' awa, Jean." The lad who won the fight, of course, was right ; and some of Jamie's pieces were quite misnamed, because of the prowess of Towsey Pow-Tam ; for Towsey had a clever pugilistic defence and a poor ear for music.

There was much tramping to and fro to Frazer's marches ; and a good deal of drilling

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to whispered commands from boy-captains, with the doubtful aid of the Strathspeys of which Jamie's fiddle seemed to be full.

The lasses invented weird dances to suit the tunes, but the *Highland Fling*, as being patriotic, was chief favourite with the lads.

The course of true love was also known to have been assisted by Jamie's attachment to the fiddle. Some couple, when they met, and conversation ran short, would sidle down to Frazer's door and listen. Sooner or later, Jamie would come to one of the sweet love songs of the north, just created for sensitive strings. The young swain would recognise a favourite ; snatch hold of a suitable sentiment, and quote it to his lass—

“O’ a’ the airts the wind can blaw,
I dearly loo the west,”

and the lass wad remember that her house, though only next door to his, was on the evening side of it, and be happy.

Jamie observed no great pause between secular and sacred. He rather liked to slur off

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from a wild reel into one of the Psalms of David ; and the lads and lasses would find that the songs of the Sanctuary nourished a deep true affection as readily as the love lilts of Tannahill.

But it was not the music alone that charmed the quiet and weary folk who would linger as they passed the Rev. Jamie's house. The sight of Jamie, though only in shadow on his window blind, brought many things connected with Jamie to mind, and things that had always a glint of sunshine in them.

When he was seen to put his fiddle under his left arm, while he turned the page of his music, it would remind some poor woman of the winter night on which he came, after most of the folk were in their beds, with the gift of a blanket, and brought it under his arm in his fiddle case, " so that neebors, if they happened to be aboot, wadna ken but what he was only makin' a ca' on his way hame frae some freend's hoose."

Some old grey-beard, catching a sight as

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he passed of Jamie standing the fiddle on his knee while he adjusted the E string, would recall how Jamie "had dandled wee John on his knee," and how, "wee John was noo a big fairmer in Canada."

And sometimes when Frazer would be leaning his chin caressingly on the tail-piece, while he drew out the wailing note of some plaintive Jacobite song, some woman would linger to be reminded how "she was huggin' her only wean til her breast ae day, when it wasna weel, and Mr. Frazer cam oot o' a neebor's door and saw her, and tellt her, that 'love saved mair bairns than soothin' pooders.'" And when he put that loved and almost living violin of his into its weird-shaped black box, and all was silent, and he stood looking at it tenderly, it was as if that day had come back again when in another house, when life and the doctor were both gone, Jamie alone tarried to whisper a few words of guarantee to the weeping woman's neighbours.

No one can tell what an insurance it was to the town of Padan Aram against every kind of

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misfortune only to see that Jamie was still in it, and hearty. A thousand fears crept through the town ; they were ghostly, but Jamie was real. It was not that he drove the fears out ; it was just that they dissolved in the recollection of the fact that he was there.

No, it was not the actual misfortunes of the people of Padan Aram that made them anxious. It was the fears of misfortunes which never came, that troubled them. Jamie helped many in his time, but these were the least of the blessings which he scattered broadcast through the town. His great contribution to the health and courage of Padan Aram was that he was there if he should be needed ; and that was the royal insurance, not of one threatened soul, but of hundreds.

“ Ay,” said the Minister, “ if the Pope o’ Rome is ane o’ the Representatives o’ God upon earth, the Rev. Jamie Frazer is the ither. And he is mair available in Padan Aram than his Holiness. What God has sent to this earth through the long line o’ Italians wi’ a mitre on,

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I canna correctly say, but this I know that the Good Lord has sent thousands o' gifts and comforts by way o' the Rev. Jamie Frazer. And if there's ony soul i' Padan Aram, wha doesna ken hoo to gae awa and tell God his trouble, the next best thing for him to dae, is to gae awa roond and tell Jamie Frazer."

"I'll gae roond by Jamie's hoose on ma way hame," said the Elder, "and see if I can get a glimmer o' his silhouette. It's a grand preventive o' nightmare."

XXVI

KIRSTY SEES THE OLD YEAR DIE

KIRSTY never had visitors on the last night of the year. When she had served the last child with its penny-worth of potted-head "for ma faither's sup," she shut the shop door, and went into the kitchen behind. The last night of the old year was always sacred to holy musing.

On New Year's Day it was different. The girls and women of her Sabbath School class came on the evening of that day to wish her "A Guid New Year." They always came in the evening, and they all came together. New Year's Day was a day of feasting and merriment in every house in Padan Aram ; but the girls and women of Kirsty's class had a way of their own. About seven o'clock they put the children

Kirsty sees the Old Year die

to bed, and before the grown-ups sat down to supper just in the interval between eight and nine, they would slip down to Kirsty's kitchen for an hour.

They were there this night, and waiting for Kirsty's word. She began to tell them of her thoughts at the death of the Old Year.

"I never kent that I loo'ed the Auld Year sae weel," she said, "till I cam tae see him die last nicht. How guid he had been to me ! There he sat in the auld armchair. He'd gotten on a coat o' mony colours like Joseph's coat. It was a tartan full o' red squares, three hundred and sixty-five o' them wi' black bands o' quiet nicks atween, and wi' his failin' finger he pointed them oot til me.

"I said, 'Ye've been a guid year tae me.' He said, 'I canna deny it.'

"'Ye've brocht me the richt number o' Sabbaths and for that I'm grateful, and an egg for ma breakfast on maist o' them, and parritch ilka ither day.' He said he hoped that I had had them a', for he had kept nane for himself'.

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“I asked him whar he had gotten a’ thae guid things for a puir auld body like me. And he said quietly, for his breath had begun to fail him (it was near twal o’clock), ‘He openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.’

“Then the puir Auld Year tottered towards the door and fell dead on the threshold. Lassies, I never kent till that moment hoo I loo’ed the dear Auld Year.

“As the Auld Year fell oot o’ the west door, the new ane slippit in at the east window.

“A moment later auld Father Time cam to whar the Auld Year fell and withoot a soond and withoot a lament, he bore him aff to whar the dead years lie buried.

“The New Year tried to mak me look at him, but ma mind was wi’ the auld ane ; and it slippit awa to see the place whar the Auld Years sleep.

“I canna just tell ye whar that is, but ma wanderin’ mind foond the place. There they lay, three score o’ them, some that I remembered weel and some that I had forgotten. I tried to

Kirtsy sees the Old Year die

read the stanes that marked their restin' place. There was naething on the little stanes o' the first few years. But I kent that those little years lay underneath, wrapped in ma mither's love, and that was enough for me.

“When I read some, I lauched ; and wi' some I cried ; and at ither I whispered, ‘Weel, it micht hae been worse ; and at ither I sobbed, ‘Would to God I had done different.’

“There was ane o' them that I loved more than the rest. That year's stane was a cross. It was the dear Auld Year when I was your age. That was the guid sweet year that led me to Jesus. Then it led me into Church Membership ; and then, after a whilie, it sat me doon in the Teacher's Chair o' the Sabbath School Class that ye a' belang til. Guid sweet Auld Year !

“One other thing made me very happy, and that was to see that a' the stanes stood facin' towards God's licht, and cast nae shadow.

“When I had gotten back hame, ma auld body was sittin' here. I creepit intil 't agen and lookit oot through its een. Dear auld body,

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but it was cauld. The fire had died doon and the candle had guttered oot. It was lang past midnicht and I was shiverin'. I hadna pulled doon the blind. I had left it up for the New Year to come in. I went and lookit oot. The sicht made me shudder. I dinna like to tell ye what I saw, but maybe it's a pairt o' the lesson. The air was still. The trees war nae langer trees but just blurs. The stars war ga'en oot ; the dawn was comin' feebly. There was nae soond, nae colour onywhar, save a dull blue everywhar ; and the earth lay rigid. There cam a great fear ower me. I thocht strangely that God must be dyin'. Then the whole earth seemed to gae wanderin' oot intil the nicht, and I forgot mysel, and swooned intil ma chair, sayin' to masel, that God—was—dead."

"But He wasna deid, was He ?" gasped one of the girls, anxious to break the spell that was over them all. "He's livin' still, is He no ?"

The old lady looked long and earnestly into the fire.

"Weel, noo," said she, "let's mak sure. . . .

Kirsty sees the Old Year die

Come close til me, Meg. There ! Noo try.
Can ye breathe on ma auld hand ? ”

The girl breathed her warm breath on the back of the old woman’s shrivelled hand.

“ Ay,” said Kirsty, “ that shows that God’s living’ ; because ‘ He gives to all life and breath and all things.’ ”

A sigh of relief passed round the kitchen.

“ And is He still merciful, think ye ? ”
asked another.

The old lady looked round upon the faces of the girls.

“ Is there ony lassie here wha has forgiven ony this day ? ”

There was a silence.

Presently a shy lass in the corner whispered, that she had forgiven that New Year’s Day ane wha had grieved her, noo that she had come to her hoose “ first-footin’.”

“ Then God canna be deid,” said Kirsty, “ for it is frae God that a’ forgiveness comes.”

“ But suppose that He should leave aff loving us ! ” suggested a weary, neglected wife.

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“ Ay, suppose ? ” said Kirsty. “ But hae ye had the children in yer love this New Year’s nicht ? ”

The girls laughed gleefully.

“ Ay, ay ! ” they cried together.

“ Then God maun hae been loving you, or hoo could you hae loved the bairns. Love comes oot frae God. If love doesna come oot frae God, whar does love come frae ? Ay, lassies, the goodness that is roond aboot us a’, this New Year nicht, is proof that God is still good til us ; and sae lang as ye hae a freend i’ the world, ye may know that ye hae a freend in Heaven.”

Then they asked each other of their welfare.

The girls left together, not afraid of the strange company of a New and Unknown Year ; because they were sure that God was with them also.

XXVII

THE QUARREL

THREE was no one in Padan Aram who knew that Duthie and the Elder had ever quarrelled, save, of course, the Minister. But they had.

The Elder had gone down to The Toll to pay a call of respect on John Duthie. He found the Stonebreaker sitting by the fire with a bandage over his eye. For some reason his greeting was not as cordial as usual. For the second time that year the people at the quarry had sent the old Roadmender a load of stone which had not only given him much trouble, but had also, because of their kind, been the cause of the accident to his eye. He told the Elder so; for the Elder was foreman at the quarry.

It was evident that Duthie was in a bad

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temper ; a condition of Duthie almost unheard of. He said some hard words about the stones, then about the quarry, and then about quarrymen in general. He wondered if it was a right thing for quarrymen to be in the kirk, especially in office : suggested that if ever another quarryman sought membership in the kirk, he would see that he was asked an extra question, not imposed upon weavers and other honest men, and so on.

The Elder put up with this for a long time, making monosyllabic replies now and then, till at last, like the strong man that he was, he gathered up all he had to say in a sentence ; and a cruel sentence it was. And this was the sentence—

“ John Duthie, it’s a pity yer faither didna stay lang enough in Padan Aram to see his bairn, and to teach him guid manners.”

Now, this was the hardest thing that any one could say to Duthie. He had never known his father ; neither had anybody in Padan Aram. For his sweet, brave, poor misguided mother,

The Quarrel

cruelly wronged when scarcely more than a child, had always refused to say who her cruel wrecker had been and, with a heroism worthy of her martyr forbears, had brought up her little John without reproach. And what was more, she had now been lying in the churchyard this thirty year.

It was cruel to Duthie beyond expression. He sat silent for a while ; then, without a word, he took up the Elder's bonnet and stick and handed them to him. The Elder well understood this action and, angry with Duthie and more angry with himself, went off in bitterness.

The two men met Sabbath by Sabbath at the kirk door. Each saluted each gravely, but they never spoke ; for they were men who held their quarrel not in words, but with the weapons of silence.

This incident happened a good many weeks before the Communion season. The Communion of the Lord's Supper took place in Padan Aram once a quarter. The occasion was always a great one and was always preceded

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by a Service of Preparation. This service was held on the Friday evening before the great Sabbath, and at it, all intending Communicants received "Tokens," to admit them to participate in the holy feast.

When it came to the beginning of the week, the Elder was much perturbed, and so was Duthie; for neither of these men, being such men as they were, could think of drawing near to the Lord's Table unreconciled.

The Elder spent the Monday night alone. His proper duty was his anxious problem. He was no great hand at sophistry, but his intuitions were grand. The arguments which rose in his mind were not logical syllogisms, they were memories of schooldays: of chats he had enjoyed with Duthie, when the Elder was yet a child, and Duthie was a brave young labourer, full of the fine sense of observant country life. It was Duthie who could tell where the weasel's hole was, and when it was full of "wee weasel bairnies"; and who would take him to the spot on the moor where the blaeberrries were askin'

The Quarrel

“why that wee Johnnie Ingles hadna come to pick them.”

And so the panorama moved before the Elder’s eyes, a veritable charm, with Duthie smiling on him everywhere.

Yet the Elder was a man of granite and, while he was easily softened by sentiment, was moved to action only by righteousness.

That evening’s memories determined him to consult the Minister, as to which of them ought in right to take the first step towards reconciliation.

The Minister was greatly surprised when he heard from the Elder that he had a quarrel. The Elder did not say who the other party to the quarrel was, nor did he go into the matter of the quarrel, for he knew quite well that the only point in the quarrel that had made the estrangement was the last sentence of it.

The Elder mentioned this point to the Minister, but put it so that the Minister received the impression that the bitter words had been said to the Elder. And the Elder, in his deep

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honesty, intended him so to understand it. How the words could apply to the Elder, Mr. Stewart could not see, but that did not matter in his giving judgment.

“Weel,” said the Minister, “ye hanna tellt me wha it was said thae bitter words to ye, and I’m no askin’. But I maun say that, whaever he was, he owes ye an apology. And if ye think it wad be ony help ma sayin’ so til him, I’m willin’ to dae it.”

“So ye really think it was a wrang thing to say ?” asked the Elder.

“Very,” replied the Minister.

“And that I had guid richt to be angry ?”

“Ay.”

“An’ to tell the man to leave ma hoose ?”

“Guid richt,” replied the Minister.

“And that ma neebor ocht to ask ma pardon ?”

“Yes, I do,” averred the Minister.

“Weel,” said the Elder, “it wasna ma neebor wha said it, it was me.” And the Elder’s head was in his hands.

The Quarrel

“Ye dinna say so!” jerked the Minister.

There was a long pause. The Minister was reviewing the case in the light of this new fact. Then he said slowly and sadly—

“I hae given ma verdict a’ the same: and a’ the same it is, Ingles, though ye said the words yersel’.”

The Elder wasted no time. He went straight to The Toll to find Duthie.

The Roadmender was by himself, trying to bring his mind into a proper frame for Preparation Day.

The Elder pushed open the door and went in. He took a chair for himself and drew it to the fire. He sat down, but said nothing. The two men rested long in silence. The logs on the fire crackled and spat and the smaller twigs turned from streaks of glowing red into lines of white ash, but neither spoke. Strange shadows of the strong men flitted on the wall behind them. These shadows looked like demons being expelled by holy silence.

At the end of half an hour the Elder rose,

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without having spoken a word, or having heard a word spoken. He stretched out his hand to his friend. His friend took it, then went to the door with him, and watched him from his threshold as he strode up the road towards the town.

Next evening Duthie was at the house of the Elder. He took a seat in by, without a word. They sat a while without remark, then the Elder, taking his snuff-box from his waistcoat pocket, opened it and passed it to his neighbour. His neighbour helped himself, then, rising, shook hands and returned to The Toll.

When they met in the kirkyard some ten minutes before the time for the Preparation Service, Duthie took the hand of the Elder and said—

“ Man, Elder, ye’re the better man. It was me began the fa’ oot, and it was ye began the mendin’. Ye’ve gotten the better o’ me this time.”

“ Friends,” said the Minister, when the two men came up to the Communion Rail at the

The Quarrel

close of the Preparation Service that night for their “Tokens” of admission to the coming Communion, “ye’re twa men whom I greatly respect, for ye ken hoo to quarrel royally.”

XXVIII

THE LAIRD'S TUNING FORK

ONLY the oldest inhabitants of Padan Aram remembered Allan Mackenzie. He was a brave lad, and he and Kirsty were well known to be very fond of each other. Some of the older women of the town would occasionally entertain their daughters with reminiscences of Kirsty walking home from church with Allan. There were even one or two who had been witnesses of the parting of this young couple, when Allan went off in the carrier's cart for Australia and Kirsty went home in tears.

The Postmistress of Padan Aram was proud to receive a letter from Australia addressed to an inhabitant of Padan Aram, and felt somehow that it was of her clemency that she let

The Laird's Tuning Fork

young Kirsty have it. After the first year the letters ceased to come, and ceased for ever.

What happened Kirsty never knew. But this is what it was.

Allan was far out on a sheep-run. During his first year he became ill and had to ride into town to see a doctor. It was a two-days' ride, and though he had company in, he had to travel home alone. On his return journey, when night came on, he hobbled his horse as is usual, and lay down in his blanket to sleep. When morning came the horse was missing. No sound or trace revealed the way it had taken. Slowly but certainly it had edged off into the forest.

Because he could do no other, Allan went off at random through the wood in hope of striking the track of the animal. He never found it, but he lost himself. Every tree and glade resembled every other. How long he wandered in the wilderness no one could guess ; but every settler knew how death came. Over-

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come with thirst, with a strange instinct he tore off one article of clothing after another in the vain attempt to assuage his raging thirst by every pore of the body, and in the end lay down naked and exhausted and died.

The vermin of the forest did the rest. It was years after that a skull and a few bones were found not far from a water-hole. Nothing remained near the skeleton whereby it could be identified. The men of the sheep-run, however, were convinced that here they had come across all that was left of the missing Mackenzie. They said that he was fortunate in one thing only, and that was that he had perished near a water-hole, or nothing of him would have been found to receive a reverent burial.

Of all this Kirsty knew nothing. She waited patiently for news that never came. It was during this waiting time that the Red Laird, who was fond of Kirsty, would come in to enquire. The Red Laird had no doubt

The Laird's Tuning Fork

that the brave Allan was dead. Nothing else could explain his silence. And the Red Laird would only have been too glad to make Kirsty the mistress of the farm at the head of the Glen, but he had too much respect for Kirsty and for the absent Allan to name such a thing while she still hoped for his reappearance.

So it happened that Kirsty gradually grew into the habit of spinsterhood and the Red Laird into the habit of bachelorhood. Two or three times in the year presents of farm produce would arrive at Kirsty's door. The carter never told Kirsty where they came from, because Kirsty never asked. Kirsty never named the matter to the Laird nor the Laird to Kirsty, but every one knew and every one understood. In the kirk, Kirsty would look very tenderly now and then in the direction of the Laird's pew when the Laird was not looking; and now and then the Laird would, when Kirsty was not looking, assure himself that she was there.

Some forty years must have slipped past in this way, when the Laird suddenly woke

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up to the fact that life itself was slipping away, and what was perhaps more strange, woke up to the regret that it was slipping away without his having known the sweets of courtship.

This is why the Red Laird began to visit Kirsty Pie when his hair was already grey. Kirsty received his visits with great good humour. Sometimes she confessed modestly to herself that she enjoyed them. There was no intention or thought of marriage now in the mind of the Laird, still less in the mind of Kirsty. He just longed for those pleasant hours in her society of which, long ago, her preference for Mackenzie had deprived him.

Friday was the day which he chose for his weekly visit. On that night Kirsty took care always to have Isabella in ; nominally to mind the shop, and, without naming it, to mind the proprieties.

The Red Laird came in like a breeze.

“It’s a cauld nicht the nicht,” was what he said when he came into the shop in the winter time, and what he said as he daundered

The Laird's Tuning Fork

into the kitchen was “Ahem ! Ahem !” In the summer the greeting was varied to, “It’s a fine nicht the nicht. Uhum ! Uhum !”

A discussion of farm prospects was followed by conversation on the doings at the kirk, with due pause between these secular and sacred subjects ; which pause was usefully occupied by the Laird in taking snuff.

This was a work of some moment. The Laird’s snuff-box was large. It was provided with a bone spoon much like that used by more ordinary folk for mustard. Two spoonfuls was just the right quantity to make the Laird feel comfortable.

When talk began to flag Kirsty would put two potatoes in the lowest bar of the grate ; a big one for the Laird and a little one for herself.

Or if dulse was in season, she would put the poker in the fire and wait till it was red hot. Then she would roast as much of this tasty seaweed as would serve for them both. This was done by twisting it round the red-hot poker.

There was one problem that exercised the

Conversations of Padan Aram

Laird every time he visited Kirsty, and that was, whether he knew her well enough to take the liberty of stirring her fire. In all his history he never dared it. This seemed a pity. The subject cost him an hour's silent consideration on every night that he spent in Kirsty's company. He never came to a conclusion ; and had he asked Kirsty she could not have told him. So he never ventured on this familiarity.

Failing a conclusion on the question of stirring the fire, the Laird always relieved his mind by saying—

“Noo, lass, it's time I was gi'en ye ma sang.”

At this remark Kirsty would call Isabella from the shop and say to her—

“Bella, the Laird wants to sing his sang ; ye'll just gie him the key note.”

Bella understood from long custom what her duty was. She came to the fender and took up the tongs. She then struck the legs of the tongs on the top bar of the grate, stood the tongs on their head with their legs

The Laird's Tuning Fork

swinging in the air, put her face between the legs and murmured a tuneful "C." Sometimes the Laird caught the note, and sometimes he did not. Sometimes he began so low that the bravest effort could not recover the lower notes of the song from their unfathomed depth, sometimes so high that effort was hopeless. Sometimes he failed to catch the tune by the head, but got a grip of it in the middle, or only laid hold of it precariously by the tail. He had been known to begin in the appointed air, then, after passing through several tunes, to draw up in the middle of a reel; faithless in an abandoned degree, to the music of his song, but true as death to the words. These words never varied. The love lilt was always the same.

"Gloomy winter's noo awa',
Saft the westlin' breezes blaw,
Mang the barks o' Stanley shaw,
The mavis sings fu' cheerie, O.

"Sweet the craw-flow'r's early bell
Decks Gleniffer's dewy dell,
Bloomin' like yer bonny sel',
My young, my artless dearie, O.

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“Come, my lassie, let us stray
O'er Glenkilloch's sunny brae,
Blythly spend the gowden day,
'Mid joys that never weary, O.”

When the song was done, Kirsty would tell Isabella to “put the Laird's Tuning Fork by.” Then she would go to the window and look out at the edge of the blind, and say, “It's a fine nicht, Laird, for your walk up the Glen.”

At this hint, which occurred with unbroken regularity at the conclusion of every visit, the Laird would rise slowly, wrap his cravat round his throat, button up his coat, and stretch himself. Then sidling to the door, he would say, “Kirsty, guid nicht, and God be wi' ye”; and Kirsty would reply, “And God be wi' ye, guid Laird.”

When Kirsty was rallied on the subject of the Laird's visits, she always gave the same reply: “Twa Courtships are almost as winsome as ae Marriage.”

THE END



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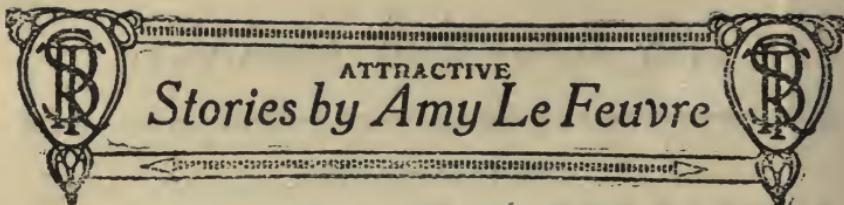
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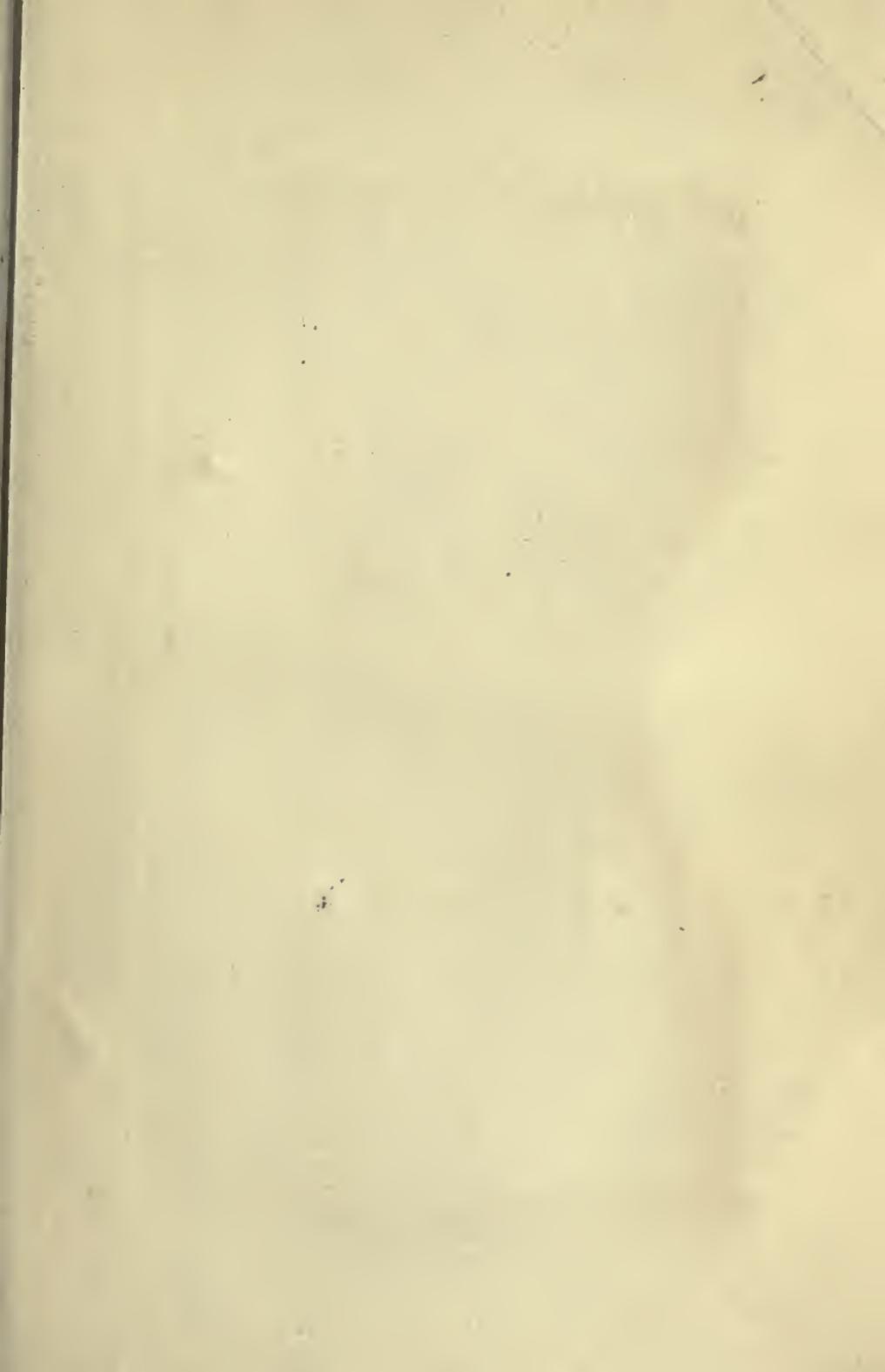
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